This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

60.954.

280 c. 3345

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MORE VERSE AND PROSE

BY THE

CORNLAW RHYMER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

CHARLES FOX, 67, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1850.

Digitized by Google

LONDON:
PALMER and CLAYTON, Printers,
Crane-court, Fleet-street.

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

LYRICS FROM "LIFE ACCORDING TO LAW," AN UNPUBLISHED OPERA.. 1 to 10

MISCELLANIES, INCLUDING A CRITIQUE BY THE LATE ROBERT SOUTHEY WRITTEN FOR THE QUARTERLY REVIEW ..... 11 to 124

A LECTURE ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT POETRY IS SELF-COMMUNION.... 125 to 157

A LECTURE ON THE POETS WHO SUCCEEDED MILTON AND PRECEDED COWPER AND BURNS..... 158 to 190

A LECTURE ON COWPER AND BURNS, THE TWO EARLIEST GREAT POETS OF THE MODERN SCHOOL..... 191 to 220

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

LYRICS

FROM

"LIFE ACCORDING TO LAW,"

AN UNPUBLISHED OPERA.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

LYRICS

FROM

"LIFE ACCORDING TO LAW,"

AN UNPUBLISHED OPERA.

Afore the woodwele, owre the brere,
Shall lanely toot, "Sic' bodies were,"
Foreslow they daft unmaklye loons,
Wha're fettled weel to chow their spoons:
Owre fat for wark, too lang they steal
Fra' sair-toil'd folk their claes and meal.

Old Ballad.

YOUNG POETS' PLAINT.

1.

God, release our dying sister!
Beauteous blight hath sadly kiss'd her:
Whiter than the wild, white roses,
Famine in her face discloses
Mute submission, patience holy,
Passing fair! but passing slowly.

2.

Though she said, "You know I'm dying,"
In her heart green trees are sighing;
Not of them hath pain bereft her,
In the city, where we left her:
"Bring," she said, "a hedgeside blossom!"
Love shall lay it on her bosom.

Digitized by Google

ARTISAN'S OUTDOOR HYMN.

Again, Oh, Lord, we humbly pray
That thou wilt guide our steps aright:
Bless here, this day, tir'd Labour's day!
Oh, fill our souls with love and light!
For failing food, six days in seven,
We till the black town's dust and gloom:
But here we drink the breath of heav'n,
And here to pray the poor have room.
The stately temple, built with hands,
Throws wide its doors to pomp and pride;
But in the porch their beadle stands,
And thrusts the child of toil aside.
Therefore, we seek the daisied plain,
Or climb thy hills, to touch thy feet;
Here, far from splendour's city-fane,
Thy weary sons and daughters meet.
Is it a crime to tell thee here,
That here the sorely-tried are met?
To seek thy face, and find thee near?
And on thy rock our feet to set?
Where, wheeling wide, the plover flies;
Where sings the woodlark on the tree;
Beneath the music of thy skies,
Is it a crime to worship thee?
"We waited long, and sought thee, Lord,"
Content to toil, but not to pine;

Digitized by Google

And with the weapons of thy Word
Alone, assail'd our foes and thine.
Thy truth and thee, we bade them fear;
They spurn thy truth, and mock our moan!
"Thy counsels, Lord, they will not hear,
And thou hast left them to their own."

THE POOR MAN'S DAY.

GRAHAME.

1.

Sabbath holy!
To the lowly
Still art thou a welcome day.
When thou comest, earth and ocean,
Shade and brightness, rest and motion,
Help the poor man's heart to pray.

2.

Sun-wak'd forest!
Bird, that soarest
O'er the mute, empurpled moor!
Throstle's song, that stream-like flowest!
Wind, that over dewdrop goest!
Welcome now the woe-worn poor.

3.

Little river,
Young for ever!
Cloud, gold-bright with thankful glee!
Happy woodbine, gladly weeping!
Gnat, within the wild rose keeping!
Oh, that they were bless'd as ye!

Digitized by Google

4.

Sabbath holy!
For the lowly
Paint with flowers thy glittering sod;
For affliction's sons and daughters,
Bid thy mountains, woods, and waters,
Pray to God, the poor man's God!

5.

From the fever,
(Idle never
Where on Hope Want bars the door,)
From the gloom of airless alleys,
Lead thou to green hills and valleys
Weary Lordland's trampled poor!

6.

Pale young mother!
Gasping brother!
Sister, toiling in despair!
Grief-bow'd sire, that life-long diest!
White-lipp'd child, that sleeping sighest!
Come, and drink the light and air.

7.

Still God liveth;
Still he giveth
What no law can take away;
And, oh, Sabbath! bringing gladness
Unto hearts of weary sadness,
Still art thou "The Poor Man's Day!"

Digitized by Google

CHORUS.

1.

These pauper-kings, these tax-fed things,
What say these murderous robber-kings?
To man with labour bow'd,
"Receive thy parish shroud!"
To woman, "Seek the homeless street,
Or prayerless grave, where four roads meet!"
To enterprise, "Be bold in vain!"
To failing strength, "Still toil for pain!"
To youth, "Thou shalt not hope!" to age, "Thou shalt not rest!"
To care-worn skill, "Thou shalt not thrive!" to genius, "Die, unbless'd!"

2.

Cain! Cain! the murder'd and the just
Speak to their brother from the dust:
"Cain!" saith scath'd Hope, "restore
The smile that once I wore."
"Replant," saith Love, "my rose replant!"
"Reclothe my bones!" saith buried want;
Thy convicts cry, "Recal our youth!
Oh, bring us back its trust in truth!"
And all cry, "Uncreate the pangs thou yet may'st share,
In millions of yet living hearts, law-wedded to despair!"

Digitized by Google

DIRGE.

1.

God said to man, "Arise, and toil,
To fill thy soul with good:"
But men said, "No! nor food, nor work:"
I toil'd, and wanted food.

2.

All ills that man can bear I bore,
With none to see me nigh;
For pain I toil'd, of want I died;
God only saw me die!

3.

"Bread, bread for toil!" I ask'd of man,
But death for toil he gave:
And now I ask "A little earth!
For famish'd man a grave!"

4.

Of God I ask, what God will give,
"Rest! till the end shall be:"
Safe in his hands, oh, sweet is rest
To woe-worn men like me!

Digitized by Google

HYMN.

1.

To live in vain! to live in pain!
To toil in hopeless sadness!
Is this the doom of godlike man,
Oh, God of Love and Gladness?
Not so the rose in summer blows,
Not so the moon her changes knows,
Not so the storm his madness.

2.

From storms that rock the oak to sleep,
Thy woods their beauty borrow;
And flowers, to-day, unheeded weep,
Whose seeds will live to-morrow:
So man, by painful ages taught,
Will build, at last, on truthful thought,
And wisdom, won from sorrow.

3.

Else, what a lie were written wide,
By thy right hand, my Father,
O'er all thy seas, in crimson dyed
When Morning is a bather;
O'er all thy vales of growing gold;
Or where, on mountains black with cold,
Thy clouds to battle gather.

Digitized by Google

YOUNG POET.

Round the rascal-beggar's bed,
Who all mortal troubles bore,
Whom the wicked vex no more,—
Let us pray.
Where the hasty prayer was said,
And poor mortals equal are,
Mocking marble mockeries! there
Let us pray.
There—where lowly lie the dead!
Lest we, too, be as the clay,
Unto God, for bread to-day,
Let us pray.

PRAYER.

Bless'd be thy name, Eternal One!
Thy kingdom come! thy will be done!
Give us, this day, our daily food;
Requite us, Lord, with good for good!
Aid us temptation to repel;
And from all evil guard us well:
For thine the kingdom still will be,
All glory, and all sov'reignty.

Digitized by Google

MISCELLANIES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MISCELLANIES.

QUEER BOBBY IN 1837.

BUT NOT THE BOBBY OF 1846.

"News! news!" "What news?"
"The skin of a butcher's a—e
Would sole a pair of shoes."

Old Ballad.

1.

If hard and tough grow butchers' bums,
Because they often ride;
If thick with cant, as both my thumbs,
Is meek Saint Agnew's hide;
If consciences grow thick and foul
With quibbles that men use;
The skin of sweet Sir Robert's soul
Would sole a pair of shoes.

2.

If greedy men, with eating ducks,
Web-footed ne'er have grown,
The landed leech, our blood that sucks,
Wont bring us beef from stone;

Digitized by Google

But if backsides, once soft as down,
Have tough as teak become,
Sir Robert, bobbing up and down,
Is like a butcher's bum.

3.

And if his soul's thin skin grows tough
With bobbing up and down;
And nought but leather's tough enough
To save a leagur'd town;
What need we do, our foes to ban,
Our country's wounds to heal,
But get some practis'd hand to tan
The well-bobb'd soul of Peel?

4.

And since the man won't think it sin
To save a soul from hell—
But which his soul, and which his skin,
May find it hard to tell—
What need we do, I fain would learn,
If such a case befal,
But lime and soak the whole concern,
And tan him, soul and all?

5.

But where a tanner shall we get,
Not squeamish in his wame?
For Brougham no longer tans such ket;
My lords, it were a shame!

Digitized by Google

Unless our Queen would musk the scum
Of bobbers, as is fit,
And send him, nick-nam'd "Baron Bum,"
Up to the civet-pit.*

THE IMITATED LANE.

Now, Landscape-Maker, that with living trees
Greatest Painting! thou should'st hither come,

* What a knitter of stockings is in a family, since the invention of the stocking-loom, Peel is in Parliament. The improved machinery of the human mind has, to this hour, wrought no beneficial effect upon him. He is still a knittér, painfully taking up spinster's stitches, worth, in a pair of stockings, fourpence! Place him in his natural position, take the pins from his fingers, force into his hand a book containing the alphabet of political science, and before the close of another year, he will cease to be overtopped in mental stature by any mechanic's apprentice. He is not a goose, and if he were, plucking one does not enable it to fly better; why, then, does he pluck himself? He is blinded by the glare of the cruel sunshine which fortune has cast upon him. Strip him of his artificial advantages, and you give him an eagle's wing. Sprung from the people, why does he not lead public opinion? The reek of the aristocratic dunghill covers him, like a nightmare, forcing on him a dream of vulgarity hostile to his noble nature. Why should such a man wish to be a Stanley? By no possible process can the healthy verjuice of humanity be turned into aromatic vinegar, acceptable in Puppydom. *Upperthorpe, 3rd Feb.*, 1837.

Digitized by Google

And here learn how the town-sick heart to please.
Can'st thou not, in thy tiny wild, find room
For a wild lane, that with capricious ease
Shading or brightening self-taught branch or flower,
Will saunter gently to a seated bower?
Or lead thee through a cloudlet of green gloom,
Cheer'd by the music of its hidden rills,
To sudden sunburst? where the hunter's cot
Looks down on rivers, and the distant hills
Climb to the firmament, yet marry not
Their purple to the orange-blaze, that fills
O'er-arching heav'n with pomp,
And peace, and power!

ODE ON THE MARRIAGE OF VICTORIA THE FIRST.

1.

Queen of our Hearts! true marriage
Is made of solid bread;
Not so, that Many-Childed Plague
Which curseth board and bed:
The ghastly league of woe with crime,
To which starv'd men are driv'n,
Though marriage call'd by law-made saints,
Hath other names in heav'n.

Digitized by Google

2.

Lady! may all the blessings
Which thou would'st give to all
Who call thee queen, or God their lord,
On thee, thrice blessed, fall!
If 'tis thy wish that every pair
Should live in love for ever,
May God return thee good for good,
And love desert thee never!

3.

But want and crime, Victoria,
Law-wedded in this land,
Are curses, million-multiplied,
That frown on every hand;
And thou wilt wake, with him thou lov'st,
From brief and troubled slumbers,
If law of thine deal lessening loaves
To famine's doubling numbers.

4.

Where'er they are, thy kinglings
Sow baseness, cant, and pride;
The name of their feudality
By wretched men is sigh'd:
Deep hatred of their race accurs'd
Gaunt orphan-victims cherish;
At home, abroad, the millions groan,
The hopeless millions perish.

Digitized by Google

5.

Then, be a Man, Victoria,
If thou would'st reign, a Queen!
Wise must thou be, and brave, and all
That honour's best have been,
If thou would'st tame the Feudal Beast,
Whose hydra-headed howling
Appals the devils whom he serves,
And Ruin, o'er him scowling.

6.

Remember Austria's daughter!
And lest thy true heart fail,
Ask what were they for whom she died,
When banded kings turn'd pale?
Around her, throne and altar fell,
In thousand fragments shiver'd,
Because she hearken'd unto men
Who would not be deliver'd!

7.

Beautiful as the cistus,
That o'er the stonechat's nest
Stoops, when the moorland clouds lie down
On evening's lap to rest,
Art thou, my Queen! the morning dews
Upon the orchard blossom,
Are not more pure than is the heart
Within thy royal bosom.

Digitized by Google

8.

But can the Queen be happy,
If millions round her weep?
In love's elysium, while hope faints,
Can Hope's Victoria sleep?
No. Bringer of Redemption! thou,
In love's elysium sleeping,
Would'st wake, to grieve with starving men,
And worth in dungeons weeping.

9.

The woodbine's cluster'd beauty,
That hides the brooding thrush,
And weds the wild hedgerose, when Morn
Shakes pearls from tree and bush,
All trembling like the skylark's wing,
Would dread his voice of gladness,
And hate the marriages of Spring,
If dower'd with hate and sadness.

10.

Behold that silent captive,
Apprentic'd to the tomb!
His heart-worn features glimmering through
The dull damp prison-gloom!
Roden? or Bradshaw? is he call'd;
Shaw? Oastler? Greg? O'Connor?
No. What his crime? Say, hath he sold
His memory to dishonour?

Digitized by Google

11.

Hath he traduc'd a nation,
Because three hundred years
Have seen her trampled people drink
Subjection's poison'd tears?
All other shame hath he eclips'd,
Barbarian, Greek, and Roman,
Blaspheming all bless'd names in one,
The sacred name of woman?

12.

Hath he betray'd the people
Unto the people's foes?
Mean triumphs given to paltriest men,
Whose gods are bonds and blows?
Deceived the poor, the everwrong'd?
And factious, noisy, froward,
Urg'd them to unpartaken death—
A cruel, skulking coward?

13.

No. He whose spirit dieth
Beneath that dungeon's pall,
Proclaim'd that all men equal are,
For God is sire of all!
Oh, Lady, if thy heart were stone,
His tale of tears would move it!
The man thou see'st is guileless, brave;
Kind, childlike William Lovett.

Digitized by Google

14.

And names of crimeless sorrow
Are whisper'd, aye, and heard,
When wide-wing'd Trouble hovers o'er
Doom'd empires, like a bird;
Till wildly old subverted states,
While tears of blood are gushing,
Create the Force that crusheth Power—
Like upturn'd ocean's rushing.

15.

At voluntary tumult
Misrule may safely frown:
Not mobs that will, but mobs that must,
Bring thron'd Oppression down!
And wise are they who timely hear
The gentle voice, which pleadeth
That self-endanger'd Pomp would grant
The safeguards it most needeth.

THE SUN'S BIRD.

1.

The cloud of the rain is beneath thee. Thou singest,
Palac'd in glory; but Morn hath begun
A dark day for man, while the sunbeams thou wingest,
Bird of the Sun! Bird of the Sun!

Digitized by Google

2.

They hear thee, but see thee not—sleepy bees hear thee,
While under sad boughs the sad rivulets run;
But thou art all music! care cannot get near thee,
Bird of the Sun! Bird of the Sun!

3.

And when from Light's fields thou descendest, and over
Thy nest the wide gloom spreads its canopy dun,
How sweet will thy sleep be among the sweet clover,
Bird of the Sun! Bird of the Sun!

4.

And, there, a white network of dewdrops the fairies,
To chain leaf and flower, in a frolic have spun;
While nigh thy dear home the tipp'd ear of the hare is,
Bird of the Sun! Bird of the Sun!

TOM AND JOHN.

1.

While eager faces at his door
Still bid the cripple welcome home;
How bless'd is Tom, though blind and poor,
And forc'd, in age, to beg and roam!

Digitized by Google

But John, though young, is curs'd with cares
Which biggen as his years encrease;
And home prepares for his grey hairs
The forest's gloom, without its peace!

2.

While wranglers curse John's race and name,
His father's grave, his sister's plea;
To soothe Tom's heart, kind words proclaim
The gentle looks he cannot see;
And still his dog will lead the blind,
To hear his tale, his daughter bend;
Nor shall her father live, to find
That faithful dog his only friend.

3.

On John his liveried menials wait,
As pompous plumes wave o'er the dead;
He dines in state, and oft on plate,
But still with aching heart and head:
Tom smiles and pines, yet sometimes dines
Where angels have their house of call,
And God his feast for fowl and beast
Spreads, in their common banquet-hall.

4.

But John's full board no feast affords;
He turns his much to more, in vain;
For household-fiends their cruel words
Still sharpen on his heart and brain:

Digitized by Google

Deep in his shuddering soul they plant
White-blossom'd sorrow's root unbless'd;
While, envying blindness, age, and want,
He woos the worm, and longs for rest.*

SCOTSMEN TO SCOTLAND,

WRITTEN FOR THE SCOTSMEN OF SHEFFIELD.

Thy Men of Men shall we forget,
Old Scotland? No. Where'er we be,
All lonely, or in exile met,
We think of them and thee.
Mother of Knox! "hast thou a charm"
That gives to all thy name who bear
Thoughts which unnerve the despot's arm,
And Will, to do and dare?
Thou bad'st him build on tyrant's bones
An altar to the Lord of Lords;
Thou gav'st him power to shatter thrones,
And vanquish kings, with words.

* This poem is founded on some incidents in the life of a late breadtaxing palaced-pauper, who unable to give vast estates to each of his many sons, (and though succeeding pretty well, yet not so well as they wished, in quartering them on the public purse,) was constantly hectored by them, and told that he had better have sent them to plough; as if they could not have tried ploughing, without leave asked of him, and with a clear saving of all the bluster!

Digitized by Google

Stern Mother of the deathless dead!
Where stands a Scot, a freeman stands,
Self-stay'd, if poor—self-cloth'd, self-fed,
Mind-mighty, in all lands.
No mitred pleader need thy sons,
To save the wretch whom Mercy spurns;
No classic lore thy little ones,
Who find a Bard in Burns.
Their path, though dark, they will not miss;
Secure, they tread on danger's brink;
They say, "This shall be!" and it is;
For, ere they act, they think.
Mother of Burns! thy woe-nurs'd bard
Not always wisely thought or said;
He err'd, he sinn'd—but, oh, 'tis hard
To ban the voiceless dead!
Mother! thy doric speech hath power
The heart with passions thrill to move;
But none could sing, in hall or bower,
Like him, thy Bard of Love.
Who dipp'd his words in lightning? Who
With thunder arm'd his stormy rhyme?
Who made his music tender, true,
Terse, terrible, sublime?
Who bade thy bard, in thrall, maintain
A freeman's port, where'er he trod?
Who taught the peasant to disdain
Proud Fashion's Minstrels? God.

Digitized by Google

Who gave the child of toil a lyre,
With living sunbeams wildly strung?
And taught his soul of living fire
Truth's universal tongue?
God.* But with torture Faction fill'd
The cup he drain'd in gloomy pride:
What marvel, if the poison kill'd?
What marvel, if he died?
Few were his days, his fortunes foul;
Bravely he struggled, though not long;
And with a poet's glowing soul,
Drew near to God in song.
For Conscience to thy poet said,
"Burns! be a martyr!" "For the truth,
I will," he cried—and bow'd his head,
And died, grey-hair'd in youth.
With little men he might not stay,
But hasted from a world unkind:
Oh, guess the worth he threw away,
By what he left behind!
And what a wreath his fame had worn,
Amid a world's immortal tears,
Had he, like England's Milton, borne
The fruit of sixty years!
But shall it of our sires be told
That they their "brother poor" forsook?

* See Coleridge's Hymn to Sunrise.

Digitized by Google

No! for they gave him more than gold;
They bought the brave man's Book!
Scotland! thy sons—and not unearn'd
This day of pleasing tears returns—
Are met to mourn thy trampled, spurn'd,
Poor, broken-hearted Burns.
And oft' again, the kind, the brave,
Who sorrow's feast, like him, have shar'd,
Will meet, to honour in his grave
Thy glorious rustic bard.
Oh, spare his frailties!—write them not
On mute Misfortune's coffin-lid!—
Ev'n Bacon err'd, and greater Scott
Not always greatly did.
A fearful gift is flame from heav'n,
To him who bears it in his breast:
Self-fir'd, and blasted, but forgiv'n,
Let Robert's ashes rest.

HYMN.

1.

Men! ye, who sow the earth with good!
Men! ye who earn the price of food;
Strong Toil, and mightier Skill!
God's Chosen! do his will;

Digitized by Google

Save from himself man's deadliest foe,
Ere Ruin mock his overthrow,
His life of wrong, his death of shame,
His shroud and grave of blood and flame!
Haste! cry aloud to all, "By good for good men live!
Build not on broken hearts! nor take unless ye give!"

2.

Shall savage drones, in baseness blind,
Breathe plagues, beneath the light of mind?
And curse the foodful soil,
To famish Skill and Toil?*

* Are the philosophers of the *Gun* and *Standard*, who pray for the destruction of trade, aware that six adults are sufficient for the cultivation of one hundred arable acres, and that, if the profits of trade failed to furnish other consumers with an equivalent for the produce, the only cultivated portion of every cultivable hundred acres in Britain would be that alone which is required for the maintenance of six adults and their families? It is of little importance to us what becomes of Messrs. *Gun* and *Standard*, but it might be well for them to take into their sapient consideration the possibility, in such a case, of the surplus of victims taking possession of the land, and the certainty that, without capital, they could not cultivate it. What, then, would happen, oh, sages of the *Gun* and *Standard*? Before the inventions of Watt and Arkwright, the people depended on the land for subsistence; they have since depended on the profits of those inventions, the landlords pocketing the surplus

Digitized by Google

Where grows the vine, the thistle dies;
From cultur'd man the savage flies;
Then, peasant, merchant, artisan,
Transform the biped-brute to man!
Bid truth, bid knowledge turn his mindless night to day!
Bid love and mercy drive the human wolf away!

3.

Men! not allow'd to earn your bread;
Men! feeding all, yourselves half-fed;
Why ask for work in vain?
Or toil for death and pain?
Shall brutal things, in human form,
Feed on your souls like rat and worm?
Say to your wives, "Ye shall not eat?"
Bid son with sire for graves compete?*
And mothers kill their babes, in flight from law and life,
Till lawless law become th' assassin's match and knife?

profits both of trade and agriculture. Destroy the profits of trade, and the landlords, with two-thirds of the people, must perish, unless the displaced population, seizing the land, can also appropriate capital previously amassed. But perhaps Messrs. *Gum* and *Standard* have really nothing to lose?

* My late fellow-townsmen, having discovered that it is the unemployed workman who brings wages down, will, I trust, soon experience that where free trade is an unemployed workman is a prodigy.

Digitized by Google

4.

Tool-Making Man! whose foodful mind *
With harvest freights the wave and wind,

* I say not that man's hand is his mind; but, had he not possessed that thumbed implement, I doubt whether his mind, with his powers of communicating and accumulating ideas, could have raised him to his present intellectual eminence. Given a jack-plane, he might have stuck it in his mouth, and worked with it; but what sort of a jack-plane could he have made with his teeth? To his hand principally he is indebted for his success in tool making; and it is as a toolmaker, or manufacturer of such things as spades, ploughs, steam-engines, and railroads, that he has wrought all his wonders. One of our most reverend doctors calls the population of such towns as Sheffield *extrinsic;* not seeming to know that till there was a manufacturer there could be no agriculture, unless finger-grubbing for pignuts deserve that name. The first toolmaker was the first gardener; he put an end to finger-grubbing for pignuts, and called agriculture into existence. He, and subsequent toolmakers, may truly be said to have *created* every ounce of food which industrial skill has since produced. If any population deserves to be called *intrinsic*, it is that which can enable a hundred acres of land, cultivated commercially, to maintain more people than any ten thousand acres, cultivated agriculturally, ever yet did. About eight hundred acres of land at Leeds, cultivated commercially, maintain a hundred and forty thousand persons;—where shall we find a hundred thousand acres, cultivated agriculturally, maintaining an equal number? Had there never been a manufacturer, a few hordes of savages, fighting with the bears for roots, would now have constituted the words *intrinsic* population.

Digitized by Google

And thoughtfully creates
The bread and life of states!
Say to the fed on tears and blood,
"Production is the root of good!"
And starve ye them who all produce,
Ye costliest things of smallest use?
Live ye in barren pomp, worst, bloodiest sons of Cain!
To shake your fists at God, and turn his good to bane?

5.

The child, that vainly toils, to aid
Parents, death-doom'd by fetter'd trade;
The sire, whose hopeless son
Lives, but to be undone;
The townsman, paid with less and less;
The homeless thrall of hopelessness;
The peasant, spurn'd, starv'd, hunted, jail'd,
Because his law-made doom prevail'd;
Still shall they feed with pangs the Moloch of the land,
That Rapine o'er crush'd hearts may drive his four-in-hand?

6.

Barbarians, no! in vain ye strive
To keep a world's despair alive:

Digitized by Google

Your baseness is our might,
Your smitten darkness light:
Mend! ere your crimes set bondage free:
Christ said, Let children come to me!
And shall ye curse the marriage-bed?
No! men shall wed, and babes be fed:
Our daughters shall not bring forth slaves;
Nor childless sons seek workhouse graves!
Nor idlers say to Toil, "Thou shalt not love and live!"
Nor blind brutes say to Skill, "We take, and thou shalt give!"

December, 1844.

ENGLAND IN 1844.

1.

Rascaldom, Parsondom,
Lazy big Beggardom,
Playing the fool!
Helping with less and less
Fast-growing wretchedness!
Catch'd Cayley creakingly,
"Young England" sneakingly
Shearing calves' wool!

Digitized by Google

2.

Breadtaxers stealing rates;
John thinking Church-and-state's
Hell is broke loose!
Brassface and Timberface
Half-fac'd by Doubleface!
Foul things, with mouths and legs,
Brawling o'er broken eggs!
Killing the goose!

3.

Four thousand poachers caught;*
Rascalry's statute-taught
Doctors of laws!
Richmondites next to be?
Teaching philosophy!
Cunning, sans intellect,
Sworn to deny th' effect,
Aiding the cause.

* The cream of this dismal jest is that the aristocracy are incurring the odium of the gamelaws, chiefly for the benefit of their imitators! The Puppydom of a town or district establishes a shooting-club; that of another a fishing-club; and in both prosecution is persecution—to the glory of the squires! It sometimes happens that a Hunt is got up in a manufacturing village; and this is as it should be. The magistracy, called upon to make good the broken fences of the farmer, are not a little betwittered. And if the hedgegapper happens to be—not a red or green-back, belonging to his whipper-in—but some filth of a filesmith, or glueboiler, or other "low varment," Tomkins blusters tremendously!

Digitized by Google

4.

Rusbrooke and Sotheron,
Kept loobies, duller none,
Not telling lies!
Benett's slaves full of cheer,
"Except when food is dear!"
Benett, to keep it dear,
Talking of cheaper beer—
Juice, and no pies!

5.

Law working ruin well;
Saints gladly bound for hell,
Ticketed "Liars;"
Gamblers employing us;
Idlers destroying us;
Squires cursing Manchester!
Rickburning Lankester
Wise as the squires.

6.

Whigs, for th' exchequer's good,
Lauding restricted food;
Cheer'd by the House!
Dead-alive Peasantry
Lov'd by the Pheasantry!
Colville exhorting them;
Rous for exporting them!
Why not ship Rous?

Digitized by Google

7.

Young Wodehouse crustily,
Old Wodehouse fustily,
Crying dear wares;
Married life dog and cat;
Fat rascals scar'd and fat;
Richmond to hawk his fish,
Knatchbull to beg a dish
Doom'd—And who cares?

8.

Jacky Finality
Still, for the "quality,"
Trying to mend;
Lords cracking Stithy's cup;
Locking his smithys up;
Vow'd to keep hare and quail
Sacred to church and jail;
Blind to the end!

9.

Fast-and-Loose almost fast;
Crack'd Stanley sent at last
Where he'll seem wise;
Plenty the farmer's hell,
Sliding scale works so well!
Radnor, and Common Sense,
(Confound their impudence!)
Calling lies lies.

Digitized by Google

10.

Daily a stinted store
Dooming its thousand more
Hopeless to strive,
Till mind o'er might prevail;
Or till endurance fail?
Till the oppressor die,
By gaunt Extremity
Eaten alive!

11.

Man against man array'd,
Famine their battle blade,
Struggling for doom!
Starv'd Erin's catholic,
Mining in Bishoprick;
Brimless hat, lacking crown,
Starving the saxon down,
Till the end come!

12.

Gunpowder quenching flame;
Jesus a hated name,
Worship a breath;
Inglis sublime as Thom;
Government Peeping Tom;
Hunger the only Power!
Scowling round town and tower,
Darker than death!

Digitized by Google

13.

Toil earning wretchedness;
Capital profitless,
Eating his teeth!
Grim mis'ry's tongue of fire
Seen o'er the famine-spire!
Sorrow and verity
Sobbing, "Prosperity
Moulders beneath!"

14.

Cobden, our "Man of Men,"
Doing the work of ten,
Each worth a score!
Bright, (star and dove of peace,
Hampden of love and peace,)
Villiers, (for honest men,
Storming the robber's den,)
Worth fifty more!

15.

Peel hardest task'd of all,
Gagg'd, kick'd, and mask'd for all,
Cooking his hash;
Slander'd man, wily man,
Bare back, and empty pan,
Gloomily waiting all
For the great general,
General Crash!

Digitized by Google

16.

Trade on her dying bed,
Lifting her languid head,
Smiles, with sad brow!
Land Leeches, damning us,
Cry, "She was bamming us!"
Farmers, in luck again,
Trying to suck again,
Milk a dead cow!

TO ————

Read again thy prize-paid, sneaking
Flattery of the basely mean?
Who wins prize, but he that's reeking
With the taint of souls unclean?
Shall I, on my kind's prostration
Waste the hour that should be bless'd?
Hoarded for mute conversation
With the best thoughts of the best!
If my trust in man is shaken,
By thy trust in wrong-divine,
Vilely is thy greed mistaken
In this gold-edg'd gift of thine.

Digitized by Google

"Born-thralls are we?" The blood rushes
To my forehead.—When wilt thou
Pay me for these burning blushes,
And the heart's pang on my brow?
Criticise thee? Let them praise thee
Who praise turncoats, turn'd anew.
None could lower, and I can't raise thee;
Turncoat Yellow! Turncoat Blue!
Backward go to worse from better
They alone whom badness feeds:
Steal ye fire, to forge a fetter?
Roses would ye turn to weeds?
Sloe to plum improv'd not rashly:
Time bears blessings on his flood!
Honour, then, thy go-back Ashley,
While we grow the greatest good.*
Lives in every leaf and blossom
Might that mocks Romanzoff's power:
Worship thou his barren bosom!
I will tend my little flower.
Spite of thee, on this I anchor:
Man by Man shall still be bless'd!
Man, and Man's! till strife and rancour
Sink, in love, to endless rest.

* The magnum bonum, a plum bigger and better than his ancestors, if he is descended from the sloes, as Mr. Adams suggests, in his masterly article on Human Progress.

Digitized by Google

SUNDERLAND'S GLORY.*

1,

God, save King Hum the Fifth!
If he give Numb a lift,
Great is George Hum!
Richmond 's not wholly done;
Thanks to Numb's holy one,
Humbug's Napoleon,
Buckingham's bum!

2.

If he pay Well-content
Ten out of two per cent.,
Hey for George Hum!
Luck is not wholly gone,
Thimblerig's holy one,
Humbug's Napoleon,
Buckingham's bum!

3.

If out of Underfed
Calfhead get Featherbed,
Welcome George Hum!
Miracle's solely done
Now, by George Wholly Gone;
Humbug's Napoleon,
Buckingham's bum!

* Printed some years before the fall, in honour of Monopoly's greatest and worthiest champion.

Digitized by Google

JOINT-STOCK IN DECEMBER 1845.

1.

Dupe sells his all for lies!
Work thinks Sir Swindle wise—
Pays, and departs,
Signing for fifties ten:
Swindle wastes Millions, then!
Rabbit-Skin Railways thrive!
Bus-ma-cu's monkey's drive
Jobs o'er crush'd hearts!

2.

What, now, are land and gold?
Gambler's bets, bought and sold!
Clerk means M.P.!
Lords knee George Hum the Fifth:
Hum gives lord Numb a lift:
Greedy's "Great God" is Hum!
God! what a day will come,
When the blind see?*

* They who could, and do not, prevent an evil, are, in part, its authors. Our law-making class, who are said to have gained more by the late Railway-Madness than any other class, could have prevented that madness, without leaving us one railway too few, by enacting that no projector of a Railway should cease to be a shareholder until the work was finished; and that no share in any unfinished railway (such shares being mere bets

Digitized by Google

DOGGREL FOR DUPES.

Who 's a dead canal to sell,
  Worth a skinn'd cat's clothing?
Who will buy a dead canal,
  Dog cheap, and worth nothing?
Rig off-hand your dead canal,
  Worth a skinn'd cat's clothing;
Rig off-hand, and lump the lot,
  Dog cheap, and worth nothing.
At five hundred thousand pounds,
  Where pluck'd geese, are cry it;
Wink at Railway Shareholders!
  And the dolts will buy it.*

in writing,) should be saleable, or legally depositable as a security for money lent. But a further enactment is necessary for the safety of good-faith shareholders in all joint-stock companies. No deviation from an obtained Act of Parliament, if it would involve an additional outlay of twenty-five per cent. or more, should take place without the consent first had in writing of two-thirds of the shareholders in number and value; their consent to be afterwards confirmed by the majority of a public meeting, specially called.

* It is a fact, that on the third of December 1845, the good-faith shareholders in a job-of-jobs which will cost eight millions—and which I will call The Gorse, Ling, Rabbit-Skin, and Shrimp Railway—were induced by their directors to guarantee forever the interest of about six hundred thousand pounds, to the proprietors of

Digitized by Google

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE CUTLERS' HALL, SHEFFIELD, 3RD DECEMBER 1845, AT A MEETING OF THE SHEFFIELD, ASHTON-UNDER-LINE, AND MANCHESTER SHAREHOLDERS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, AND GENTLEMEN.—Here is another Dead Stock to sell, for the benefit of the vendors! But if a majority of you are not canal proprietors, in the name of all creeping things, why are we to buy these dead ditches? And if we are to deal in dead things, why are we to deal in dead canals only? Why not buy dead road-coach-and-cart interests? Plenty of them can be had dog-cheap, and worth nothing; capital bargains, as railway-bargains go. I know a carrier whose interest might be bought for ten pounds, and he has a better claim on our charity than these canal gentlemen. If you commit one great stock-error, you will never divide a shilling out of profits. Be cautious, then, for this motion is a trap—not, I hope, set by your directors, but for

sundry dead canals, not worth sixpence! the vendors of one of which publicly feted the secretary of the purchasers! Need we wonder, if, some three years later, the shareholders of this Railway were urged by their directors to oppose government surveillance? If the history of the concern were truly written, I believe, such a plica polonica of folly or wickedness would be laid bare, as never yet met public exposure.

Digitized by Google

them; it is a trap, laid by a broken-down whale, to catch railway-gudgeons. It is founded on the assumption, that River Dun shares, which cost originally one hundred pounds per share, are worth one hundred and twenty pounds per annum per share for ever. For ever, mind! Now, £120 is the interest of £3000 at 4 per cent. Then, it is clear as figures can show it, that we are to give £3000 per share for River Dun shares, which is £500 per share more than they were ever worth, and, I believe, thirty times as much as they would sell for if offered to the market in mass, as they are offered to you—supposing that they would sell at all in that way, which I don't believe. Well, out of what are you to pay this £120 per share per annum? Not out of one penny per ton per mile, freight and dues, for that will barely pay canal expenses, and railways can carry profitably at a halfpenny. Then, you are to pay it out of the profits of your main line, and literally throw £100,000 away. But how do you know that you will have any profits? Your directors cannot be very sanguine on that point, if they are putting off the evil day, by paying dividends out of capital. But even if we were idiotic enough to enter into this partnership with the dead-alive on any terms, why are we to run all risks, and they none? Beware how you place

Digitized by Google

yourselves in the position of parties, who out of their ultimate 3 or 4 per cent. will have to pay the deficits of their amalgamations, guaranteed at 6, 8, 10, and 12½ per cent., and yet by no means so preposterously guaranteed as your directors now propose that you shall guarantee the River Dun Co. If the Railway King himself, who will bite anything like bait, will take this bare hook, he ought to be called Gudgeon the Great. Don't buy a horse-laugh too dear. We are laughed at in all directions; in every train persons are shaking their sides at this expected hooking of railway gudgeons; a great fat fellow from near Bolton was laughing at us through his very guts this morning—and he shook mine! for mine are not so well lined as he intends his to be, if you pass this motion: he is a River Dun shareholder. You may laugh; some people laugh at funerals—the winners, I mean; but don't you give a splendid funeral to a dead interest, if the result is to be beggary and a parish-coffin for your own. The proposal is monstrous; monstrously characteristic of the brazen modesty of the parties making it; and until it was made, I did not know that even their brass could bear so black a polish. Whom are we to enrich with our hard-earned savings? Men who are supporting the cause of the destruction of their own property—and this rush into

Digitized by Google

railway-speculation, a hundred years before the time, by leaving nothing else to rush into? Look at their prospectus. Why, with one noble exception, there is hardly a man on the list, who is not either a landowner and monopolist through bone and marrow, or a River Dun shareholder. Is it for such people that we have been toiling all our lives? I thought I had been toiling to keep the oppressor's foot from my neck, his greedy mouth from my children's trenchers. And what is this Dun and Coal Railway to pay, if made? Nothing to the good-faith shareholders; three thousand per cent. to the setters of the trap! Why, they are getting out, as shareholders, though they believe you to be stark mad. To be sure, the guarantee of madmen cannot be worth much. And mad indeed you are, if you are prepared to pass this motion. If it pass, you will see your shares at £50.* If it pass, I can have no faith in public bodies; for I must conclude that they can be led wrong at any time, by any party who will take the trouble.†

Our Have-Noughts, and our Have-Somethings, I trust, are by this time convinced, that Old Monachism, Communism, and Irresponsible Joint

* They were then at £117. They are now (September 1849,) at £25.

† I got seven votes, out of about three hundred!

Digitized by Google

Stock Administration, are as like each other as three rotten apples.

One object of the directors of the Sheffield, Ashton under Lyne, and Manchester Railway was, to amalgamate with the Lincolnshire line to Grimsby. They did not tell the shareholders that to accomplish that object they would have to make a sacrifice on their tariff, equal, it is said, to a loss of fifty thousand pounds per annum for ever! nor when they called on them to ratify the bargain, did they tell them that the sacrifice had been made! But four years later, when it was plain that the amalgamated line could pay no dividend, they defended themselves by pleading the sacrifice, and the construction of the Lincolnshire line with money borrowed at seven and a half per cent., to complete the original line, which is, in consequence, still unfinished! They now boast that the amalgamated line will accommodate the queen and benefit the public; but let it benefit whom it may, I hold that every penny which has been expended on any public work that can pay no dividend, is so much capital sacrificed by the community.

To show my readers that I make a distinction between railways and railway-delinquents, I advise them to read the article on "Human Progress" in the Westminster Review for October 1849, writ-

Digitized by Google

ten by, perhaps, our greatest living mechanician, and certainly by one of our greatest living benefactors of his species; an article which ought to be accessible not merely to the two or three thousand readers of a costly publication, but to all. The progress already made by the freetrade doctrines is strongly confirmatory of his views. And if we really have got freetrade, and can keep it, I venture to predict that it will so enrich and enlighten society, that in a few years a regular Communist, say, an equal divider of unequal earnings—or a Joint Stock Bank, with unlimited responsibility—or a Great Railway, without something like government surveillance—will be as rare as a phœnix! If I am asked how I reconcile government surveillance with freetrade, I answer that to prevent evil is the especial province of government. Thus, to prevent the loaning of money to foreign governments (and consequently swindling, gambling, and war,) would be no interference with the principle of free trade, but a legitimate exercise of governmental authority, the result of which would be peace, and sore discomfiture to such giants as Billy Baker of Writtle, and Nicholas Romanzoff.

Digitized by Google

THE BARD AMONG HIS BETTERS.

About two years ago, (this was first printed I believe, in 1837,) I was summoned to York on a jury, the case to be tried being "Widow-Somebody, tenant, *v.* Rafe Cheeke, landowner." The widow's husband (on his deathbed, not dreaming that she would lose the farm,) fallowed about eighty acres of land; but, soon after his death, she got notice to quit, Cheeke refusing to pay for the fallow; so, she sued him for the cost of it—about £740. A special jury of landowners was summoned to try the cause; but for some reason or other, the name of a single tradesman appeared on the list.

When eleven landowners had answered, and several other landowners had been called without answering, (if I had not answered, I should have been fined,) the man who called the names boggled at mine, but at last, syllabled out "E-be-nezer Hel-hot, Sheffield!" Four respectable witnesses proved the plaintiff's case; and as eleven of the jurors were landowners, the defendant, I thought, if his defence was worth a straw, might have trusted it with the jury; but the judge, without hearing one of the defendant's witnesses, non-suited the wretched plaintiff.* On a previous

* "He declared that the customary law, called 'Cus-

Digitized by Google

occasion, I had found some difficulty in obtaining the money which is allowed towards the expenses of special jurors; but on the occasion to which I now allude, the jurors (they being landowners,) had taken care to be paid beforehand; that is to say, the money had been given for distribution to one of their number; as tough-looking a slave-driver as can well be imagined. A steak cut out of the tenderest part of him, I suspect, would draw the teeth of the stoutest handloom weaver now in a state of vegetation. His eyes (they had the genuine landowner's gunpowder expression,) seemed constantly liable to go off at half-cock; and, Reader, if thou wilt suppose that his brain was made of iron wire, which had grown through the skull of him, and appeared outside in the shape of black pig's bristles, thou wilt have some idea of the thatch under which this savage dwelt; but it would require a Fielding to describe the frown which he gave me, when I held out my hand for the money. "What!" he seemed to say to himself, "shall a landowner do an act of mere justice to one of his feeders, without insulting him?" The cash seemed to be fastened through his palm

tom of the Country,' (the tenant's sole reliance!) was not binding on landowners;" so that if a landowner would appropriate his tenant's capital, he need only reject his proposed successor!

Digitized by Google

to the black wire in his heart and brain; but, at last, with a sob, or grunt, or growl, he paid it; and then he, and his gentlemanly brethren, set up a horse laugh. I whispered to my heart, as I sneaked out of court, with my friend "Gospel Luke," an attorney, "We know what we are, but we know not what we may be." "Who would be a landowner's tenant-at-will? or that tenant's sub-slave? or that sub-slave's son, tried in the landowner's parlour for killing God's hares? or the landowner's younger son, if unable to quarter himself on the public purse? or the landowner himself?—beggared if the public refuse to pay the interest of his mortgage!"

Throughout my long life, I have only met with one landowner, and never with a landowner's underling,—no, not even a land-valuer—who did not talk as if he thought he had a right to trample on all who are not landowners. Forty years ago, Gentlemen-farmers, when flushed with the not-then-unusual grape, delighted to ride over townsfolk on the King's highway. Now, the sons of those gentlemen-farmers are literally slaves, viler than the Virginian negro; and their owners ride rough-shod over them and us. Oh, triumphs that won a food-tax, which is to end in revolution! national debts, then, are not public wealth! taxation without representation is not liberty! and

Digitized by Google

inconvertible one pound notes, depreciated thirty per cent., (as Tony Lumpkin found, when he went to Paris after the war,) were never worth twenty silver shillings each! My poor father (the rebel,) was right, after all! and so they hunted him out of society, for his honesty and wisdom.

WAS IT A DREAM?

When Hum the Fourth (that woolpack of a man,
Dubb'd Whale of Victory,) had clos'd the feast
Of carnage, which his blood-burst sire began,
And his humm'd people from rejoicing ceas'd,
(As well they might, while reading in dismay
The bill for bloodshed which they had to pay,)
I dream'd a vision that had come to pass!
Lo! near a pool, whence thick black slime did glide,
Graz'd a huge, fat, blind, many-headed ass;
And while with plenty flow'd the champain wide,
The blind ass shook his ears, and prophesied
That winds would blow, streams run, and oceans roll!
Then, from the pool arose, with dogged stare,
A babbler, famed for minimum of soul,
His face like one half of a trencher square

Digitized by Google

Set corner-wise upon a barber's pole;
A wooden visage, that look'd somewhat droll
With its best corner, like a snout, before.
"Be still, ye troubled ears, and thou, Ass, peace!"
Exclaim'd the ligneous feature: "Why this roar?
Wage war on nature, and thy fears will cease:
Then, worst misrule will but encrease thy store,
And make each truss thou hast worth two or more.
War, War! wage War! and leave to me the Fates."
Thereat long bray'd the mighty many-ear'd,
And shook the wood of ears on all his pates;
Wide gaped his plural gab; and stiff he rear'd
His fundamental plume! for much he fear'd
(And now detests,) all bums that are not tail'd.
"Let there be war!" he bray'd, and war there was.
But still the rivers ran, the winds prevail'd,
The seas roll'd, as before. What then? the ass
Thought *he* grew fatter. But it chanc'd, alas,
That *men* began to think it would be worse
For them, if war should bring down the old sky;
Some groan'd o'er emptied pouch, and some did curse;
Some ask'd how ducks would swim when ponds were dry?
But Ass in Wooden-Head's divinity
Firmly believ'd—and doth so to this day.
"Perish the future! let the present thrive!"

Digitized by Google

Said then th' omnific Word; and 'gan display,
While trembled every short-ear'd soul alive,
A cobweb flag! This wav'd he o'er the hive
Of workers, who deplor'd their riches gone.
They shudder'd, when they saw his fingers foul,
From which dropp'd hungry maggots, one by one,
Into their porridge, or potatoe-bowl.
But mighty Many-Ears, an ass of soul,
Though born stone-blind, and with a smelless nose,
Declar'd that grubs are manna from the sky.
Nor was this all. Though still the tides arose;
Though rivers did not leave their channels dry;
And though the golden words of God on high
Brightly denied th' Omnipotence of Ears;
Yet prov'd the cobweb-flag a magic wand,
That shook the boldest with resistless fears;
And while that wooden statesman's putrid hand
Fann'd it, in viewless wafture, o'er the land,
None smil'd, save Knaves; but loudly laugh'd the mad,
Ev'n at their prayers—and then they hang'd the sad!
Meantime, the Ass, kicking the sick and thin,
Through all his ever-gaping throats drank in
The venomous air, and swelling like a whale,
Bade the bright sun adore his rump and tail;

Digitized by Google

And eke the scroll which did his rump adorn,
Whereon a word of power was written black,
Appalling her who limp'd, with garments torn,
And famish'd baby dying on her back;
While she, afraid to beg, still sobb'd "Alack!"
This scene beheld a stern old wight, who chose
To wear odd legs, whereof the one was small,
And did not look like flesh and blood: Heav'n knows,
Right fond he was of wounds, and cannon ball,
And dev'lish loath to have a head at all!
Yet ill thought he of certain honour'd knobs;
For he had bled beyond the eastern foam,
Where people die with dollars in their fobs;
And now and then, your blockhead, forc'd to roam,
Grows wiser than your dunce who stays at home:
He was a war-worn and a woe-worn wight,
Whom some call'd "Glory!" and he tried to reach,
With hand thrown back, red rags (a sorry sight,)
That hung behind, and once conceal'd his breech.
His soul, too proud compassion to beseech,
Turn'd from his own, to weep for others' woe;
But he was one whom caution could not teach;
He stump'd, with strange short jerkings, to and fro,
And cried, with sudden gape, "May God confound
The thief, who sells ten shillings for a pound,

Digitized by Google

And thrives by seething blotted rags in gore!"
Next, lo, methought, around the monster's door,
A mob of asses broken-back'd and grey,
Bellow'd like billows on a rocky shore,
With harmless kick, and multitudinous bray,
"That they were cheated in their daily hay!"
But Many-Ears, to whom belong'd the land,
Call'd one truss three, and would for three be paid!
He curs'd the dolts who could not understand
That One was Three; and ask'd them why they bray'd?
Before them all a single truss he laid,
And "Lo, three trusses of sound hay!" said he:
"Three! that they *are* three, thus, I prove, with ease—
Your fathers toil'd from morn to eve for three,
And you shall toil from morn to eve for these!
And Rascals! straw is hay, and chaff is corn."

AS A SEQUEL TO THIS POEM, I APPEND THE FOLLOWING LETTERS ON

BETS, BUBBLES, BANKING, AND BLOODSHED.

TO EDWARD SMITH, ESQ.

SIR,—I wish your friend, Samuel Bailey, no man being more able, would write another book on banking, though it might convince me that on

Digitized by Google

this twentieth of April, 1846, I sat down to write a foolish letter. I should not have done so, if I had not read in the *Independent* of the 11th instant, your truly powerful lecture on the restrictions imposed by the Act of 1844, on Joint-Stock Banks; yet I ought to apologise for addressing this letter to you, as I do not intend to controvert your opinions. Neither shall I allude particularly to joint-stock banks, the public being, with good reason, satisfied that their paper may be safely held; yet as such banks, unhappily for the public, must, in the nature of things, inevitably die out and cease to be, it is necessary, perhaps, that I commence with a few remarks on them. Why must joint-stock banks die out? Because it will soon be impossible to find persons willing to be partners in them. Why? Because joint-stock banking possesses neither of the two requisites which are both essential to the full success of all joint-stock associations, and without the possession of, at least, one of which, no joint-stock association whatever can be safe from ruinous rivalry—the power of unwearied attention to minute savings, out of which competing individuals and private companies make fortunes, being, by the constitution of things, mercifully denied to joint-stock companies. And what are those two re-

Digitized by Google

quisites? They are, that the business proposed to be carried on in joint-stock shall require greater capital than private funds can furnish; and that the business shall be capable of being transacted by prescribed rules, or routine, like the measuring out of water from a tank, or of space on a rail-road. The London and Birmingham Railway Company possess both those requisites; the Sheffield Water Companies, possessing only one of them, must amalgamate, or compete; the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway Company, for the same reason, could not have continued to compete with the Midland. But it is already too well ascertained that a large paid-up capital is injurious and dangerous in joint-stock banking; and what merchant is ignorant that every or any bill presented at a banker's counter, may require distinct and serious consideration? Perhaps there is no business which depends so much for its weal or woe on the accident of management, as banking does; and, alas for expectation, when ever-restless chance is the rock on which it builds! I could name three immense joint-stock banking establishments of this neighbourhood, which in a few years, or months, dissipated a capital of, at least, two millions; and before they ceased to spill money like water, became mere discounters or

Digitized by Google

issuers of redrawn paper—their own, at last! They all failed; the inconvenient public losing little, the partners all. Why did they fail? Not because they had not capital enough, (they had too much,) nor because their business could be transacted by routine; but because it could not. Well, but can I deny that joint-stock banking succeeds in Scotland? No, for Sawney is a strong-headed man; but as he could as easily, were such his intention, dethrone God, as annihilate principles, I shall (with all respect for him, as a thriving banker and clever fellow, and without particular allusion to him, or his joint-stock brethren,) proceed to show, if I can, that notes on demand, treasury bills, and all similar paper, circulated as money, are false in principle, productive to the public of uncompensated evil, and dangerous to the peace, liberty, and happiness of the world at large. I sat down to write a very long letter; but it is politic to consider, just now, that Parliament being in session, and the desk of Robert Leader the younger, probably well stored with copy, three or four short letters will be less unwelcome to him, than a pamphlet-epistle, on a gloomy and painful, though important subject.

P. F.

Digitized by Google

TO EDWARD SMITH, ESQ.

SIR,—Robert Owen might rejoice, even in the awful fact that the insane never co-operate, if it could be shown that the sane co-operate wisely; but how often do we see failing properties, which are unsaleable in mass at cost price, lotteried off, as it were, into joint-stock, (in a late instance at three thousand per cent. premium!) and sane men eagerly contending to become co-partners in such properties, though profit in them is impossible, if the principles on which depends the success of joint-stock associations are correctly stated in my last letter? Let them not forget, however, that my business in this letter is not with joint-stock associations. You justly complain that the legislature has acted partially in its interference with the business of joint-stock bankers. Certainly, the legislature ought not to interfere with the honest transactions of any man; but is banking, as it now exists in this country, honest? Differing, as it does, from fair money-lending, by selling as money an article which is not money, it is a nuisance, and ought to be suppressed. I do not mean that bill-broking and true bills of exchange ought to be suppressed, but that the trade in false money ought. True bills of exchange would

Digitized by Google

be received and paid, if there were not a note or a coin in existence. If not defeated by false money, discounting false bills, they will balance each other when at maturity, as bankers well know, no cash whatever being absolutely necessary to pay the balance of the current day's bill account; for a cheque on a grocer, for a few pounds of tea, would be sufficient for that purpose.

But what is false money? Be it what it may, the thing which can be produced at will, to any amount, in a few hours or minutes, and is issued as a thing representing valuable time, thought, skill, labour, and material, cannot be true money; because it really represents the impudence, rascality, or insolvency of the issuers, and nothing else. Money, so called, may, with sufficient exactness for all purposes of fair discussion, be divided into three kinds, good, bad, and worst. The good can in no respect or degree be produced at will, and being nearly worth its nominal value, never injuriously affects prices, or causes ruinous speculation; the bad, affording in the proportion of its intrinsic worthlessness, a profit to the issuer, and, in the ratio of its depreciation, affecting prices injuriously, transfers, in two ways, the hard earnings of honest industry to the idle and unprincipled; and the worst, producible at will in any quantity, and not at all representing valuable

Digitized by Google

raw material, or well used time, or honest skill, or productive labour, is, like the Bank of England note, (that chartered vilest,) a fraud of the worst description, and the parent of lies, crimes, and miseries without end, furnishing corruptionists with the sinews of war, tempting even good governments into ruinous conflicts and rash expenditure, and forcing tens of thousands of well-meaning men into speculation and bankruptcy. Now, this is the stuff which you bankers sell as money, and for which some of you give money!

The Bank of the United States (a chartered libertine, like the Bank of England,) caused a great portion of the industrial means of America, (enriching by the process none but idlers and gamblers,) to be invested in railways, some of which will never pay a farthing interest, and others be wanted, perhaps, a century hence. The consequences, we know, were disastrous and disgraceful in the extreme. General Jackson, insulted by the bloated managers of that establishment, tried to restrain their insolence by chartering a number of smaller banks, not foreseeing that the little rogues would act on the same principle as the great one! Now, I by no means wish for more chartered evils; but in what particular, I ask, except in not taking its partner by the nose, does the Bank of England differ from

Digitized by Google

the late Bank of the United States? And if the notes of the Bank of England and the Exchequer bills of Government are mere accommodation paper, I ask, why copies of gamblers' bets, and the scrip of bubble railways, are not also issued as money?

Let us suppose that Lord George Bentinck, or any other philosopher, determines to lay a hundred wagers, of a pint of ale, or threepence each, that of two lice, one white and the other grey, both to be placed on a hot plate a year hence, the white will outrun the other; and then ask ourselves what reason can be given which does not equally apply to Exchequer Bills, why a hundred copies of the bet might not be issued as money, payable one year after date? Then, let us suppose that the Bus-ma-Cu Railway has been provisionally registered, or even that an act for it has been obtained. You may think with me, that if we had a government worth calling one, the scrip of railways provisionally registered, differing, as it does, in no respect from the supposed Bentinck wager, would neither be saleable nor depositable; you may think with me, that even the shares in a railway for which an act had been obtained, ought neither to be saleable nor depositable, until after such railway has been finished and some time in operation; and you may think with me, that if

Digitized by Google

such gambler's paper had not been saleable and depositable, the capital of this country would have run no great risk of being invested in uncalled-for railways; but still, I ask, what reason can be given which does not equally apply to Bank of England notes, why the scrip of moonshine railways, or the certificates of shares in never-to-be-finished railways, might not be circulated as money?

To simplify the matter by complication, let us suppose another case; that the farmer's friend, the Duke of Buckingham, or any other enlightened patriot, delighting and privileged to do good by stealth, determines to enter into partnership with Lord George Bentinck, or any other philosopher, and issues notes on demand, called farmers' blessings, but finding in due time that he has done more good by stealth than is quite convenient, buys up the notes of the partnership with the supposed Bentinck bills; in what would such transactions differ from those of the British Government and its pet, or partner, the Bank of England?

If Killafew's notes, exchangeable for gold, on demand, are circulated as money with Blackleg's bets and Bus-ma-Cu scrip, both exchangeable on demand for Killafew's notes, is it not plain that the nature of the case will remain unaltered, if we make Blackleg's bets, or Bus-ma-Cu scrip, legal

Digitized by Google

tender instead of Killafew's notes, Killafew being just as responsible as Blackleg, and Blackleg as Bus-ma-Cu. And if brother Jonathan, resolved on war, finds that his treasury notes are not transmutable into blood, is it not plain that he will remain at peace simply because nobody will trust him? and equally so, that the peace of the world ought not to be staked on such chances? Let there be no notes, or similar loans, and nations will consider, *in the first instance*, whether it will be well to exchange their corn, or cloth, or hardware, for gunpowder and desolated hearths?

If, then, bubble-scrip, gambler's bets, bank notes, and exchequer, or other accommodation bills, are all bastard children of the same chaste mother, why should there be any difference in their reception and treatment? If it would be a crime punishable with transportation for life, (as I am sure it ought to be,) should Lord George be tempted to issue his bets as money—then, Van Dieman's Land would gain by our misfortune; but I must say, that her Majesty's ministers, and the directors of the Bank of England, in that event, ought to encrease the national calamity, by accompanying the philosophic statesman "over the salt sea foam;" for the cure of the giant evil of false money will be vainly attempted by imposing penalties on the issuers of false bills, or

Digitized by Google

other accommodation paper, so long as Government itself sets the evil example.

But does not by far the most important portion of the circulation or currency of commercial nations consist of bills of exchange? Certainly. And if the notes were withdrawn, might not bills take their place, and affect prices injuriously? Not if they were true bills of exchange. There is a distinction, eternal as the heavens, between the bill which can be produced at will, and the bill which cannot; between honest cheques, or true bills of exchange, and bank notes, or exchequer bills, or other accommodation paper. True bills of exchange represent beneficial transactions, of which it is impossible to have too many; and beneficial transactions, of which true bills are evidence, represent well-used time, deep thought, useful skill, productive labour, and valuable material. If, then, it is impossible to have too many beneficial transactions, it is equally so to have too many true bills of exchange. The bills which can be produced to any amount, at will, are not true, but false bills. We cannot produce bread and butter in that way, nor the chisels or saws that will produce bread and butter. How convenient, then—when the younger sons of an aristocracy that lives on murder, must procure big-beggar posts, by getting throats cut in Scinde

Digitized by Google

or Affghan—are bank notes, ready to supply the place of gold withdrawn from circulation! and exchequer bills, ready to withdraw the bank notes! Yes, for bank notes are not readily convertible into human blood, spilt on distant battle-fields; nor is silver so effective a murderer as gold; the latter, from its portability alone, being actually worth five per cent. more in the murder-market than any other bullion! The advocates of chartered evils *boast* that the Bank of England has usually about eight millions of bullion in its coffers; but they forget to tell us, *that if the bank were not privileged to borrow money, the interest of which is paid by the lenders, no* bullion would be locked up in its coffers! and that the bullion actually locked up *is a premium for war, ready and prepared to do the worst evil, and no good!* In the hands of the public, who pay the interest, it would be usefully employed in some way, offering a premium, not for war, but for peace, and the peaceable production and exchange of desirable commodities. Think of these things, honoured members of the Peace Society! and in my next, I will try to aid your meditations.

P. F.

Digitized by Google

TO THE EDITOR OF THE INDEPENDENT.

Sir,—Your correspondent "P. F." appears to have written his last letter with an iron pen dipped in gall.

He will, forsooth, tolerate bills of exchange to any amount when founded on legitimate transactions and payable on a future day; but, no sooner does the owner of one of these bills, through his friend the banker, turn it into smaller bills, payable on demand, than his anger is kindled against what he is pleased to call the representative of "the impudence, rascality, or insolvency of the issuer," although both transactions have their foundation in credit.

His philippic against the "old lady" in Threadneedle-street is in bad taste, for it shows a great want of gallantry, and, as he is so deficient in what makes us bipeds so proud, he must either be a very young or a very old man. If the former, he may be excused for his ignorance of the past history of the "old lady," which if he had studied, he would have found abundant evidence that she "had done the state some service, and they know it, but no more of that;" if the latter, then he must surely be a remnant of the old goldsmiths, so wedded to the article of his trade, and so acute in the detection of "false money," that

Digitized by Google

he looks with jaundiced eyes on the circulation of all tokens which do not bear the impress of his Sovereign or require to be weighed in the scales; but in sober sadness, I much wish he would answer two simple questions, viz., "what is money?" and "what is a pound?"

A CONSTANT READER.

20th May, 1846.

BETS, BUBBLES, BANKING, AND BLOODSHED.

TO EDWARD SMITH, ESQ.

SIR,—I am not sorry that I am unable to extol the merits of sham money, after the manner of practical men, those merits having been amply extolled by the wise men of Birmingham, whose disquisitions on the subject ought, I think, to be written in letters of brass, and deposited in the British Museum,—on the principle of reverence, or hero-worship, which might be supposed to actuate Thomas Carlyle, if he wished to preserve a lock of Benjamin Disraeli's hair.

How odd it seems, that scarcely one sane or practical man in a million can see that falsehood is not truth, until some fool or madman has been

Digitized by Google

pilloried for making the discovery! The majority of sane or practical men, in all ages, have been through life martyrs to the faith, that falsehood is truth; and, alas! not even one madman in ten thousand ventures to peep over their ears at the true religion! Yet, in a letter which appeared in the *Independent*, of the 6th October, 1832, (four years before the commencement of the late crisis,) some questions on currency were addressed to the public, several of which are still worth the attention which they did not then receive. The writer, who was, of course, insane, asks, "Whether in May, 1832, the bullion held by the Bank of England was not less than one million? Whether, in October, 1832, the bullion held by the Bank of England was not eight millions? Whether every dealer in bullion does not know that a good bill will always buy gold or silver at the market price? Whether the Bank of England, in 1825, did not restrict its discounts, to avoid buying gold *at a loss?* Whether that restriction of discount did not cause, or rather constitute, the crisis of 1825? Whether the power of raising or lowering prices at will can be safely trusted in human hands? Whether the United States of America were not, (in 1832,) suffering great distress, in consequence of having a monopoly or chartered bank? Whether corn-lawed and bank-chartered John Bull

Digitized by Google

was a bull or a goose? And, whether tariffed and bank-chartered Jonathan was not as great a goose as his brother?"

It seems to have been the object of this madman to show, that the way to make money plentiful was, to leave it in the hands of everybody; and that the way to make it scarce was, to let one huge establishment buy it, and lock it up when cheap, in order to sell it when dear, to some cut-throat preparing to butcher his neighbours.

"Through what a succession of frauds," says a prohibited author, "have cunning rulers reduced the English troy pound of silver to four ounces!" Pooh, those cunning rulers were bunglers. "What a blessed thing," he ought to have said, "is sham money, when made of paper!" It seems to possess some of the attributes of the Deity; or rather, shall I say, of that other awful personage who is piously supposed to share omnipotence with him. It can dig canals which are not wanted. In America it is said to have constructed railways, which may never be wanted, locking up in them the capital which is wanted now. It can create, in a month or two, national prosperity which will not produce general bankruptcy in less than a year or two. And, blessed beyond all other blessedness, it can go to war without a shilling! deluging battle-fields with gold

Digitized by Google

transformed into human blood, and spilt for the sole benefit of gamblers and cowards, safely trading in wholesale murder; besides which inestimable advantages, it costs little, and, though more changeful than the chameleon, possesses one grand characteristic of a true standard of value, invariability—being always worth its weight in waste paper.

He must, then, be indeed a madman, who would destroy such advantages, at the cost of fifty millions invested in gold or silver coin, the interest and wear of which would be a loss to the public of about three millions a year. Perhaps so, but let us inquire.

There are pious sages yet living, who, fifty years ago, thought, and still think, that thirty, or forty, or fifty millions a year, were wisely, ay, and religiously, expended in waging anti-jacobin wars; which wars could not have been waged if the artifice of sham money had not prevented useful men from perceiving that the profits of the steam-engine were destroyed by them, or transferred to idlers, gamblers, and cut-throats. Those wars cost the people of this country, (whom the profits of the steam-engine ought, long ago, to have placed out of the reach of poverty,) three thousand three hundred and eighty-three millions, worth, at five per cent., more than one hundred

Digitized by Google

and sixty-six millions per annum; and the corn-laws, arising out of those wars, have already cost more by one hundred millions than all the cultivated land of England, Scotland, Wales, and the British islands, would sell for at twenty years' purchase, if let at two pounds per acre; say, on the lowest estimate, one thousand five hundred millions' worth, at five per cent., seventy-five millions per annum; the two sums amounting to the astounding loss of two hundred and thirty-one millions per annum *for ever!* And shall I be told that it would be absurd to expend three millions a year, for the prevention of national throat-cutting and corn-laws in future?

To you, Sir, a banker interested in honest and useful transactions only, and directing one of those banks by which it is barely possible for the public to sustain injury, I need not repeat the fact, which you cannot but know and deplore, that by collusively obtaining discount for their sham bills, executives like ours enable their masters to enjoy the luxury of carnage, and hideously fatten on the public misery. In what a frightful condition would even the late railway speculation have placed this country, if Sir Robert Peel had not, when almost too late, placed a warning snaffle between the teeth of bankers? Let us assist him, then, to convert the snaffle into the sure curb of

Digitized by Google

metallic currency; and depend upon it, Sir,—if supply follows demand, and the bullion required cannot be supplied without increasing the demand for the goods which must pay for it,—all honest bankers will do more rather than less business, and their customers permanently gain by a temporary inconvenience. I hope and trust that to his other peaceful triumphs, he will add yet one more, by repudiating for ever the currency which is falsely called money, the least of the evils of which are, that it forces men to lend without security, and pay interest to *borrowers!* The only safe and desirable paper currency, (that which consists of true bills of exchange,) will then flow unimpeded, like a river of light and blessedness; or if impeded by sham bills of exchange, (Government being no longer a dealer in such frauds,) a disgraceful penalty may, *without inconsistency*, be imposed on drawer and acceptor, (both being still liable, as at present, to pay dishonoured bills,) if they fail to prove that they drew and accepted for valuable consideration, and that the twofold security, which in the nature of things, *true* bills of exchange offer to the endorser, was defeated without intention, by the mischance which the Great Giver (perhaps to humble, occasionally, the pride of intellectual power,) seems to have made inseparable from our condition on this side the

Digitized by Google

grave. How full of good is the omnipotent rule of His mercy! When morning dawns over the rocks of Rivilin, transforming the dewy greenness under their stunted oaks into gold, that seems to melt and flow,—if a cloud passes over the sun, the gold disappears, and the bright greenness is darkened, but no desolation follows the vanishing gold, or accompanies the darkening greenness. How capricious, wasteful, cruel, and murderous is the unbridled selfishness of man! When the glorious wars and sudden prosperity, which sham money can create, have passed away, rash speculation, lavish expenditure, and splendid butchery are followed by cureless bankruptcy, hopeless depression, and that legalized murder which is called just punishment for the crime of inflicted want! The slayers, indeed, are slayers still; but the broken heart is not healed—no resurrection comes to self-respect destroyed—Rachel, weeping for her children, refuses to be comforted—and the slaughtered peasant returns not to his desolate habitation.

If Freetrade is peace, if Christianity is peace and love, no Government, issuing false money, can govern well, the fact of its issuing such money proving that it governs badly; for it takes the apple without planting the tree, and strikes down him who planted it—trading in that by which no

Digitized by Google

good man will profit, war! and if war is murder, and murder the worst of all violations of the vital principle of nature, (that of the free exchange of blessed equivalents,) destroying life, for which no equivalent *can* be returned; then, no advocate of false money, in any form, can be a freetrader, or a Christian. And if, had we never dealt in false money, we should have had fewer wars, less debt, and no corn-laws; if we should have rejoiced in no horrid victories of European and other idolaters, over heroic Sikhs, worshipping the one only true God, or other battles for big-beggar posts in China, Affghan, or elsewhere; and if Great Britain would not have been, as it now is, one big-beggar post from sea to sea, with all-beggared and land-butchered Ireland for its damning foil; then you, Sir, as a promoter of the peace and love for which the Prince of Peace died on the cross, are bound to deprive tyrants, if you can, of the weapon which they have found most effectual in compelling quiet and good men to labour for valiant wretches hired to do murder, and cowardly quarrellers, trading in carnage safely and by wholesale.

P. F.

Digitized by Google

TO THE

EDITOR OF THE SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT.

SIR,—Your correspondent "A Constant Reader" wishes to know "what is money?" and "what is a pound?" A pound troy of gold is 12 ounces, which can be coined into about 47 sovereigns. The sovereigns are money; and the gold, whether coined or not, is value. The little things on demand, with which the "old lady" contrives to get possession of the true bills that will buy true gold, are not value—because they "represent nothing but the impudence, rascality, or insolvency of the issuer;" and they are not money, because, if issued as money, they injuriously affect prices, which true money does not and cannot;* neither can true bills of exchange, though false ones can, and do.

P. F.

THE CURRENCY QUESTION;

OR, BETS, BUBBLES, BANKING, AND BLOODSHED.

SIR CHARLES WOOD,—The rediscounted endorsements of joint-stock banks are now perform-

* No increase of the precious metals ever affected prices suddenly.

Digitized by Google

ing the evil function of the inconvertible notes of the Bank of England during the war, by transferring honest earnings into dishonest hands; just as those notes invested the profits of the steam-engine in the trade of national robbery and murder; for accommodation bills, which, in the days of private banking, soon found their way into the *Gazette*, are now, if endorsed by joint-stock banks, safe to all but the *partners*.

The remedy required, and practicable, is a heavy and disgraceful penalty on accommodation bills: no bill, not even a true one, ought to be renewed, without expensive protest, publication, and consequent discredit; and as no railway can be anything until it is finished and paying, no share in any unfinished railway ought to be saleable or depositable, except, perhaps, in cases of bankruptcy or death.

What! interfere with freetrade? Freebooting is not freetrade; neither is sham-money real.

Few men now need to be told that all which any nation can save, by substituting paper for money, is the interest and wear and tear—*which saving, if made, belongs to the public;* no individual, or association whatever, having any more right to it than to the money in her Majesty's exchequer. Besides, if borrowers are allowed to receive five per cent., instead of paying it, they

Digitized by Google

have an unfair advantage of ten per cent. over honest men, and, at the same time, offer a premium of 20 per cent. for immorality—ten per cent. in favour of corruption being 20 per cent. against its opposite.

The whole currency question, then, is narrowed to this: Might not a saving to the public of about 2,000,000 a year be safely made, if all bankers' notes were suppressed, Government issuing notes instead of them, through a minister responsible to Parliament, and with a rope round his neck if he caused the price of gold to rise one shilling per ounce, or about the eighty-fourth part of an ounce?

I once thought the experiment might be worth trying; but the late letter of yourself and Lord John Russell to the Bank confirms all previous experience, *that no government can safely be trusted to issue paper as money*. It may be true that paper-issuing governments have no direct interest in lessening the purchasing power of their issues; but such governments always pocket the depreciation, in the first instance, and, when all prices have risen, increase the taxes in proportion. Some writers, I find, are of opinion, that issues of government paper might be safely coextensive with taxation. If so, the worst or most taxing government might safely issue the largest amount

Digitized by Google

of paper money. That this is not true, let us hope.

What, then, is our alternative? The truth, and not the lie—metallic money, and true bills of exchange, which (if not defeated by sham money and sham bills,) will always balance each other when at maturity, and be found sufficient for all honest national purposes.

Lord John Russell, I thank Heaven, is wrong in thinking that periodical crashes in trade are inevitable. They are results of what is called the *wisdom* of governments. With freetrade established in all true things, and no other, even bad harvests in succession could not produce such revulsions; commerce (if it have fair play,) being naturally less precarious than agriculture—or, God have mercy on us! Are you destined to prove this practically? We knights of the Quixote species would fain say, yes.

I am, Sir Charles, very respectfully,

(or rather I was),

ONCE A BULLION MERCHANT.

6th December, 1847.

All these letters were first printed in the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent.*

Digitized by Google

CRITIQUE,

WRITTEN BY THE LATE ROBERT SOUTHEY FOR THE QUARTERLY REVIEW, BUT REJECTED BY THE EDITOR, AFTER THE AUTHOR HAD CORRECTED A PROOF FOR THE PRESS.

1. *Night. A Descriptive Poem. Part I. In four books.* London. 1818.
2. *Peter Faultless to his Brother Simon; Tales of Night in Rhyme; and other Poems.* By the Author of "Night." Edinburgh. 1820.
3. *Love; a Poem, in three parts. To which is added, the Giaour, a Satirical Poem.* By E. Elliott. London. 1823.
4. *Corn Law Rhymes.* Printed by Order of the Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society. Sheffield. 1831.
5. *The Splendid Village; Corn Law Rhymes, and other Poems.* By Ebenezer Elliott. London. 1833.

THE pamphlet which bears the extraordinary title of "Corn Law Rhymes," and the not less remarkable *imprimatur* of a Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society, was introduced to the "reading public" by a well-written letter in the "New Monthly Magazine," addressed to the Poet Laureate, and recommending the poems to his notice as the productions of an uneducated poet. Such, indeed, they might have been supposed to be at first sight, printed as they were in a cheap form (price ninepence), and manifestly intended for

Digitized by Google

circulation among the class of men from whom such a society was composed. That the author had identified himself with that class in his political opinions and feelings, or rather passions, was evident at a glance; but the perusal of a single page might have shown the critic who so successfully and so justly recommended his poems on the score of the ability which they displayed, that whatever the writer's education had been, he had long and elaborately studied the art of poetry, and long and diligently practised it.

The celebrity which these "Cornlaw Rhymes" obtained surprised the author himself. He says,—

"Two generous critics (one of them writing in the 'New Monthly Magazine,' and the other in the 'Athenæum') have praised so highly this little, unpuffed, unadvertised book, that I am almost compelled to doubt whether I still live in England. What! in the land of castes and cant, take a poor self-educated man by the hand, and declare to the world that *his* book is worth reading! To the select writers and readers of the 'Squires' Review,' such conduct must be utterly incomprehensible, and ought to make Gifford, in his coffin, shake the worms from the brow of a dead slave. One of my warm-hearted critics, he of the 'Athenæum,' in his kindness and zeal for my welfare, (which cannot but be sincere, and for

Digitized by Google

which I shall never cease to be grateful,) advises me to rhyme no more politics. Poetry, he thinks, is thrown away on such subjects. I think differently, and I will tell him why. But I must first inform him, that I have long ago published poems which contained no political allusion, (two of them are reprinted at the end of this volume,) and that the worst of them all might justly claim a hundred times the merit of the 'Cornlaw Rhymes.'"—*Preface*, p. 47.

There are some things in this passage upon which a few observations must be made, before we proceed to comment upon the drift and tendency of the 'Cornlaw Rhymes.' A little reflection might have shown Mr. Elliott, that if the book of a poor self-educated man carries with it the stamp of desert, it is likely to be more favourably received because of the unfavourable circumstances in which the author has been placed, and of the difficulties he may have had to struggle with. A little reflection might have shown him that, in what he calls "the land of castes and cant," this has always been the case, and that it is so at this day. He has mentioned Burns; and poor Bloomfield, and Clare, and the Ettrick Shepherd, might have occurred to his recollection. But, in fact, he himself in this very preface virtually acknowledges that it is so, when he asks,

Digitized by Google

whether the notice which had been taken of his "Cornlaw Rhymes" was owing to the supposition that they were the work of a mechanic? Undoubtedly, in some degree it was; though nothing could have been more erroneous than the opinion that they were the productions of an uneducated man. Mr. Elliott must have been as much amused at seeing them introduced to the Laureate with such a recommendation, as the benevolent and otherwise judicious critic, who thus introduced them, must have been surprised, when he saw in the poet's recent volume, a dedicatory inscription for one of the pieces, in these words:—

"To
My great master,
Robert Southey,
who
Condescended to teach me the Art of Poetry,
I most respectfully
DEDICATE
This Drama."

Why then should Mr. Elliott, who knows that the gifts of poetry will be given in vain, unless they are assisted by the grace of art, and who has condescended to study that art, why should he say that there are many mechanics in Sheffield who can write better than himself? As a poet, in which character it is that he appears, and is

Digitized by Google

speaking of himself, he must be well aware, not only that there are not many persons in that rank of life in that populous town, who could write as well, but that there are very few in the three kingdoms, and in America to boot. When he writes his best, indeed, there are none who could write better; and when he is possessed by radicalism, God forbid that there should be many who, in such a spirit, should write so well! He says, of the poems which he formerly published, and which contained no political seasoning, that the worst of them had a hundred times the merit of the "Cornlaw Rhymes." If this opinion were well founded, the obvious inference would be, that to their political tendency the recent publications are indebted for their celebrity. In a great degree that inferenee would be true, and would be wholly so, were there no other difference between the earlier and later productions, than that the latter are in the spirit of the times. But this, though the greatest, is not the only difference. The art of poetry, as he well knows, is neither soon nor easily acquired; and he was acquiring it when those earlier poems were produced. They are the work of a learner—of an aspirant. They contain abundant proofs of genius, but the best of them are composed of heterogeneous materials, like the image in the

Digitized by Google

king of Babylon's dream, and the clay and the brass are in greater proportion than the precious metals.

It is Mr. Elliott's own observation, that "perhaps no publication is less calculated to excite notice than a volume of poetry by an unknown author." This has been the case whenever poets were numerous.

> "Quis leget hæc?—
> Vel duo, vel nemo,"

has ever been the dissuasive remark of the prudent friend to the aspirant author; and more than in any former age would it be the part of a true friend, in the present times, to use the language of dissuasion. The race of men whom Wordsworth eloquently describes as—

> "Poets that are sown
> By nature; men endowed with highest gifts,
> The vision and the faculty divine,
> Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,
> Which, in the docile season of their youth,
> It was denied them to acquire, through lack
> Of culture and the inspiring aid of books,—"

that race has now become as scarce as the bustard upon our heaths and plains, and the cappercailics in our forests. But while that moral culture, by which alone the true poet can be perfected, has become rarer and more difficultly to be attained, no garden was ever more highly manured than

Digitized by Google

the common-field of intellect is at this time. More students are annually entered at the Royal Academy, than there were sign-painters in all England a century ago, when every shop, as well as every inn and ale-house, hung out its sign in conspicuous colours. Aspirant poets have increased, perhaps, in a still greater proportion; the gift of versifying appears to be less uncommon than the talent of design, for which the peculiar adaptation of two organs is required, accuracy of eye being of no avail without dexterity of hand. That the means of improvement should be within reach of all,—that education should be so general, as that there should be opportunities for genius of every kind to develope and manifest itself, is beyond all doubt most desirable; but it is also to be wished that the fine arts were cultivated more frequently for their own sakes, and that men would be warned in time not to engage in them as in a profession or trade,—not to build upon them their expectations of advancement in life, and their hopes of fortune, still less their means of subsistence.

Those volumes of Mr. Elliott, which contained "no political seasoning," were carried to a market overstocked with poetry. They obtained that share of notice which every book that issues from the public press in a substantive shape obtains in

Digitized by Google

the regular course of monthly and weekly criticism; and they had their ordinary share of censure and of praise. The first of these volumes is advertised in a subsequent one, with the "decided opinion" of the "Literary Gazette," that it "possesses much original excellence;" and with the recommendation of the "Anti-Jacobin Review" "to all lovers of poetry," for the originality of its language and descriptions. On the other hand, the "Monthly Review" pronounced it to be "the *ne plus ultra* of German horror and bombast;" and the "Monthly Magazine" appears to have delivered a sentence not more favourable. Such censure and such praise are of so little avail, that it matters not under which of the forms an unlucky book is entered in the literary bills of mortality. The sort of criticism which is intended for the improvement of a young author, and by which alone he is likely to be improved, is never to be found in critical journals. The task of pointing out faults in design or execution, of indicating where the defects lie, in what mistaken principles, or want of knowledge they have originated, and how they are to be avoided in future, requires a minute attention, which is rather to be expected from private friendship, than from a public writer, though perhaps it might come from a stranger with most effect. There are few authors to whom

Digitized by Google

admonitory strictures, in the language and spirit of good will, would not be found highly beneficial at the commencement of their career. But that public criticism in this country is too generally either eulogistic or vituperative, there are flagrant instances with which every reader's recollection will supply him. The legitimate objects of presenting a fair estimate of the book, and of assisting the author who may be willing to be so assisted, to discover and correct those faults from which no young author can be free, are disregarded for considerations which, in the mind of an equitable critic, ought to have no place.

It may be said, that such criticism as has for its special end the improvement of the author whose work is under review, would be "flat and unprofitable" to the general reader, for whose use and entertainment all journals are intended. It would not be so if the book were worthy of the pains, and the critic competent to his task; but some rare qualifications are required for such competency; and perhaps Pope's assertion that—

"Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss,"

still is, and always will continue to be true. Indeed, were some skilful satirist to compile canons of criticism from the journals of the last thirty years, the contrariety of opinions in matters of

Digitized by Google

taste would be ludicrously apparent, and the want of consistent principles, and of adequate acquirements in the self-constituted censors pitiably so. That improvement which has brought the whole junior race of poets up to a certain standard above the level of the antecedent generation, has been effected, not only without the aid of contemporary criticism, but actually in spite of it; it has been brought about by imitation of those authors who have been attacked with most severity, and with most confidence condemned. "*This won't do!*" was the memorable phrase with which an arch-critic, some twenty years ago, commenced his reviewal of Mr. Wordsworth's great poem, "The Excursion." Nevertheless, *it has done;* no other poet ever produced so great an effect upon the style of his contemporaries, and the mind of the rising generation, as Mr. Wordsworth; and whatever may be the fate of the critic's other works, these three words will secure for him a remembrance as long as English literature continues to exist.

Mr. Elliott resented the attack of the "Monthly Reviewers" in a contemptuous satire; and in the preface to another poem in the same volume, he expressed more seriously his resentment. The poem which they had so unsparingly condemned, he said,—

Digitized by Google

"was written under great depression of mind, in sorrow and despondency. I thank those critics who have spoken of it with candour; nor ought I perhaps to be sorry that it has enabled those literary bigots, the 'Monthly Reviewers,' (whose sapient liberality, connected, as it is, with the names of Cowper and Kirke White, will be immortal,) to write a masterpiece of criticism in which they have excelled themselves. Inasmuch as their attack may affect the sale of my book, I have certain uncomfortable reasons for wishing it had not been made; for my purse is pathetically poetical; but on no other account is it of the least importance. On all subjects of poetry, the 'Monthly Reviewers' are of less than no authority: they are the men-milliners of literature. Yet (for I would not resemble them in anything) let me be just even to the nameless oracle of petulance and prejudice, although they would extinguish at once a schismatic bardling, who has fed on hopes and tears, until he has become almost as poor and lean as their own criticisms on poetry. I allow them the merit of which, perhaps, they are most proud, and truth rewards the acknowledgment, that, in the genuine virtues of the cruel coward, their infallibility is unquestionable. Always anxious to avoid hostility, and

Digitized by Google

equally ready to repel aggression, I will impress the precept upon the minds of my children, never to shrink from the enmity of persons, whom God, in his inscrutable wisdom, has cursed with minds capable only of evil perception, and hearts cadaverous and putrid in vitality. When a creature, without name, home, character, intellect, or sixpence, (I beg pardon of decorum, but language sinks beneath the expression of the vileness to which I allude,) when such a reptile, after turning over at the publisher's counter, the title of a book, and reading a line or two in the first page, proceeds to pass on it his sentence of unqualified condemnation, what redress can the author have, if that redress lies not in his own arm? And if the circulation of the work in which he has been traduced, be extensive in proportion to its general atrocity, how great is the injury which he has sustained!"

This characteristic passage shows the same temper of mind which has since manifested itself in the "Cornlaw Rhymes." The vehemence of the author's feelings has hurried him beyond those bounds which, in his cooler judgment, he would not have overpast; and the strong resentment of injustice has made him guilty of injustice

Digitized by Google

himself. Mr. Elliott, indeed, was not a man to be daunted by censure at any time; nor, if judicious criticism had been addressed to him in a conciliatory tone, was he, at that time, an osier that might have been fashioned how to grow. The tree was of tougher texture, and had taken its bent. Thus he describes himself when his first printed poems were published.

TO THE REV. J. B., WITH A COPY OF "NIGHT."

A care-aged bard of thirty-eight,
Weighing two stone more than cuckold's weight,
Who may not be the thing he should be,
But would be clever if he could be,
Who—lo! what good the loves have done him!
Has had eight bantlings father'd on him;
And, though he ne'er had free grace any,
Might tell his faults (some say they're many),
Like Byron, were he skill'd to word it,
But that he can't, like him, afford it;
Of form erect, and hurried pace,
Not rather rough-dash'd in the face;
Whose grizzly locks, that once were brown,
And somewhat curly, are his own;
Whose dark frock-coat and neckcloth plain
Cause him to be for quaker ta'en,
Or saint, (sad blunder!) or demure
Quack-doctor, who all ills can cure,

Digitized by Google

Save ills i' the pocket, which the poet
Would hide just now, but cannot do it;
In stature dwarf'd, not five feet seven,
Too much to sheepish blushing given;
With ghost-like brow, and pale blue eye;
As question'd man in office shy,
Yet form'd for action, though not well,
And prouder than the devil in hell."—

Peter Faultless, &c., pp. 202-4.

This is a more faithful portrait, in its better parts, than that from the engraver's hand, which is prefixed to another of Mr. Elliott's volumes, and in which the artist seems to have aimed rather at personifying the Tyrtæus of a mechanics' anti-bread-tax society, or of a Sheffield election, than the poet of nature. The poet has not flattered himself in his metrical sketch; for the pride which he proudly acknowledges might probably have been called, with more truth, a consciousness of his own powers; and the finer materials must largely have predominated in the moral constitution of one, who, on the verge of forty, could describe himself as still shy, and incommoded with bashfulness. That they should predominate, an address to the muse, in one of the books of "Night," seems both to promise and to prove:—

Digitized by Google

" Oh thou, with thought coeval, who didst teach
Man, the barbarian, in the dawn of time,
Songs grandly wild, and wildly beautiful!
Thy suitor calls thee, in the gloomy hour
Congenial with his soul, while the winds chaunt
The dirge of the past year, and the moon sets
Red on the heathy hill, the couch of storms.
High Spirit! privileged to fly where soars
No seraph's wing, and in the heaven of heavens
To talk with God! by thee upborne, the bard,
A favoured stranger, roves where hallowed streams
Warble through bower'd Elysium's boundless bliss;
And, as with silvery locks dishevell'd, treads
The eternal verdure. To thy votary
The royalty of fancy give thy words
Immortal! When the spectred Night is past,
He yet may seek thy footsteps, on the hill
Where sleeps the young year cradled on the snow;
While o'er the wan flower tripping, fairy feet
Crush not a leaf that strews its dews on him,
And shake her shining pearls from April's hair.
Yet, while the love-taught skylark meets the morn
With music, and the sunny-cloud showers wide
The daisy o'er the dews,—yet may he seek
Thee, as in better days, when all he saw
Was beauty, and hope led him by the hand,
And to his blissful eye the face of man
Was mirror'd truth, and heaven in miniature.

Digitized by Google

Smile on him, Thou, his early hope adored!
Still burns within, sublimed, the living fire;
And ere the coming of the long, long night,
The dreamless and the dread, whose gloom no star
Illumines, and whose slumber doth not breathe,—
Fain would he dedicate to memory
Some strain, though sad and tuneless, yet not quite
Unworthy of the spirit he invokes."—

Night, pp. 67-9.

Another of his introductions manifests the same tone of reflective feeling, and the same cast of mind, in a strain of highly elaborate language. It is an address to the Sun:—

"Descend from heaven, proud prosperer! and oh
give
With light to darkness, 'good to all that live.'
Thou canst not—for on earth is known to none
The smile that is not sister to a tear:
Man dreams of hope, but always wakes to fear.
World-lighting flambeau of that awful One
Whose greatness thought hath not conceived,—
thou bright
And ruby-hair'd similitude of might
Omniscient, yet invisible and low,
The stillness of All-Power upon his throne,
The life of life, whose fountain none can tell!

Digitized by Google

Thou flar'st o'er ocean's nation-girding streams,
Fearless of change, as though indeed thy beams
Were of the eternal, uncreated light.
High, not secure; bright, not unchangeable;
Oh, couldst thou boast immutability,
Man's envious awe to worship thee would bow.
Thou eye of splendour, say, what dost thou see
With that bright glance, above, around, below
Unweeping pride and pleasure only? No,
Vicissitude and ruin are to thee
Too, too familiar; and thou look'st on woe,
And feel'st no pity. Thou thyself shalt fade
Extinguish'd as a taper. He who made
Can unmake all things. He who reigns alone,
The sole unrivall'd; He, whose burning throne
Is wheel'd on suns, shall quench thee with a frown,
And cast thy dust beneath his axle down;
Crush'd, thou shalt roll no more. No wrinkle yet
Of age insults thy beauty. Thou art bright
As man's vain youth, with harlot joys beset,
Who says, while love, in ecstasy divine,
Seals his warm cheek with life that glows like thine,
'My fortune shall be splendid as thy light.'

Digitized by Google

Thou laughing parent of the woful years,
Hence with thy beams that mock the sorrowing heart!
In all thy pageantry of flame depart!
And let me commune with pale Night in tears."

Peter Faultless, &c., pp. 51, 52.

In this, as in many other passages of Mr. Elliott's poems, it may be perceived on what authors he has dwelt, till he has associated their conceptions with his own. And nothing can be more strange than that he should ever have been mistaken for an uneducated poet;—unless, indeed, it be that he should have been eulogized as being "no sentimentalizer," every page of his serious pieces being in the highest degree sentimental, and bearing the strongest marks of elaboration! There were some prominent faults in Mr. Elliott's earlier volumes; the comic pieces were disfigured by coarseness; and in the tragic ones horrors were heaped on horrors. That uncultivated minds delight in what may be termed hyper-tragedy is proved by popular ballads, properly so called,—those which ballad-mongers of the lowest class compose for the wide public upon the same grade with themselves. "The Lady Isabella's Tragedy," and "The Bloody Gardener," are examples of this.

Digitized by Google

Nor is this taste confined to the lowest vulgar. "Titus Andronicus" has been twice revived on the London stage,—once for Quin's benefit, who must therefore have chosen it himself, and no doubt had as much satisfaction in performing Aaron the Moor as in enacting Cato. The same abominable story has been dramatized in Dutch, by Jan Vos, and was, during more than a century, the most popular play among all the stock-pieces of the Amsterdam theatre. But we need not go abroad to discover that literature has both its dram-drinkers and its foul feeders. Those eminent patriots and dealers in spirituous liquors, Messrs. Coates and Fearon, have more customers for their gin than for their wine; and the proportion of coarse minds is as great as of coarse palates. They who have neither understanding to comprehend, nor heart to feel, those fine touches in which true pathos is conveyed, have yet flesh that can be excited and thrilled by horrors. There is nothing new or surprising in this; the wonder is when a poet, who possesses legitimate power, and can move the heart as it ought to be moved, chooses to play the terrorist.

It is not necessary to produce specimens of these faults; nor indeed would they now have been noticed if Mr. Elliott appeared to have outgrown them. We shall presently have to consi-

Digitized by Google

der errors that draw after them far graver consequences. But, before we proceed to consider his poems in their political tendency, let the readers see him, in his better feelings and better mood, offering a tribute to the memory of his early teacher,—in his own words, "one of the most respectable of an ill-rewarded class of men,—a humble schoolmaster. He was one of those unsophisticated beings whom the *improved* state of society will no longer permit to subsist among us. He was disinterestedness personified; a man of genius; of infantile kindliness, of patriarchal simplicity,—the gentlest and most benevolent of living creatures. Humble, pious, industrious, and resigned,—'he lived and died as few can live and die;' and his appropriate epitaph would be,—'Here lies the best of men, Joseph Ramsbottom.'" This is the person whose worth his grateful pupil has perpetuated in the following strain:—

"Don, like a weltering worm, lies blue below;
And Wincobank before me, rising green,
Calls from the south the silvery Rother slow,
And smiles on moors beyond, and meads between.
Unrivall'd landscape! Oh it is a scene
That to remembrance brings the hope-bless'd days,
But not their hope! And at my feet, serene
And cold lies he, and deaf to mortal praise,

Digitized by Google

Who from this mount erewhile rejoiced to gaze;
Who in this temple plain and unadorn'd,
Duly as sabbath came, throughout the year,
The word of Him in Jewry heard and scorn'd,
In Jewry scourged and slain, rejoiced to hear;
While age shed oft the involuntary tear,
And younger voices sweetly joined to sing
The warbled anthem, plaintive, soft, and clear,
Till soar'd the soul on pure devotion's wing,
And God look'd down, and angels, listening.
Daughters of Memory! shall the good man sleep
Unnoted, though immortal, in the grave,
While forms of angel-mockery seem to weep
O'er tyrant vile, or viler willing slave?
The lying line shall prosperous villains crave,
To bid their flatter'd baseness live again?
Shall verse from sure oblivion try to save
Each worthless name? and no unvenal pen
Write, 'Here lies nature's child, the best of men,
The sire of that mourn'd youth, whose soul of fire
Cherish'd in mine a spark that else had died,
The love of Milton's song, and Ossian's lyre,
And Burns', to glory's noblest sons allied.
Cold o'er thy bosom shall the earthworm glide,
Where communed oft that low-laid youth with me.'
And shall I hang my harp on Rother's side,
For ever mute and stringless there to be,

Digitized by Google

Teacher and friend! without one strain to thee?
Teacher and friend, who bad'st me syllable
Words cull'd from learning's page with weary eye!
Thy patience taught me zealously and well,
But could not teach like thee to live and die;
To envy nought beneath the ample sky;
To mourn no evil deed; no hour misspent;
And, like a living violet, silently
Return in sweets to heaven, what Goodness lent,
Then bend beneath the chastening shower, content.
But thou no more, with eye refresh'd, shalt see
The long-watch'd seedling from the soil aspire,
Or bind the rose, or train the gadding pea:
No more shalt thou for victor flowers inquire;
Or proudly hear the expected guest admire
Thy gemm'd auricula, a growing flame,
Or polyanthus, edged with golden wire,
The poor man's flower, that lifts to humble fame,
Till e'en in print appears his envied name.
Who now shall tend thy plants, thy priceless flowers,
Emblems of thee, but not more pure than thou?
The Morn shall miss thee, and the dewy hours
Of Eve deplore, as I deplore thee now;
And Spring shall pass her hand athwart her brow,
When not a gem of thine shall deck her hair,
Then shake in haste the dewdrop from the bough,
And to the spot where thou art laid, repair:

Digitized by Google

'Where is my Druid?' Death shall answer,
'There.'
How hopeless, happy spirit, is the groan
When God calls guilt from all his joys away!
But heavenly sweet is music's saddest tone,
When o'er the lyre of Love Death's fingers stray;
Less sweet the sound, when winds of midnight play
On that wild harp which well thy skill could frame.
And when thy dust was mingled with the clay,
To weep o'er thee Affection, Friendship came;
And there was one who could not sob thy name!
Thou, guest of angels, hast of praise no need;
But I have need of thine and virtue's aid:
And, taught by thee each deathless lay to read,
Shall I forget my teacher lowly laid?
Though every strain of mine, alas! must fade,
Like idle vapour on the barren sea,
Shall I forget the Christian undismay'd,
The meekest child of truth and purity?"—

Love, pp. 85—88.

If Joseph Ramsbottom's pupil had written always in this strain,—thus wisely, thus thoughtfully, thus tenderly, thus religiously,—he would not indeed have blazed forth like a meteor; nor would it have been asked, "Is not the Cornlaw

Digitized by Google

Rhymer a king?" but he would have enjoyed an immediate and abiding recompense in the approbation of that "still small voice" which is heard in the inmost heart, and he would have had his future reward in that enduring good fame (to look no further) which is the sure inheritance of those poets who deserve it. Such a fame was within his reach. Alas! in Mr. Elliott's own words,—for they occur in *his* "Night," not, as the reader might suppose, in Young's,—

"It is himself whom man hath cause to fear;
Cruel in kindness, terrible in love,
His heart strange contradictions reconciles,
Itself the strangest."—P. 8.

The demon of anarchy has never inspired anything more ferocious than the whole of the Corn-law Rhymes,—those poems which have given Mr. Elliott his "crowning" fame.* He might be congratulated on that fame, if the power and vigour of these pieces could be contemplated apart from the spirit that they breathe and the purposes to which they are devoted; but if the vials of wrath are to be poured out upon this

* *Adsum dirarum ab sede sororum; Bella manu letumque gero!*

Digitized by Google

guilty nation, and the author should live to see the fulfilment of his poetical and political prophecies—(wishes we will not call them), it will be to him like "Luke's iron crown"; and "Damien's bed of steel" could not inflict upon him keener pangs than he would feel in reflecting that, to the utmost of his power, he had contributed to inflame the madness of the people. In that old-fashioned book "The Whole Duty of Man," which was once in general sale and in deserved repute, Mr. Elliott, peradventure, may in his younger days have read, and would now do well to perpend this admonition:—"If thou wilt not be guilty of the murder committed by another, take heed thou never give encouragement to it, or contribute anything to that hatred or contention that may be the cause of it. For, when thou hast either kindled or blown the fire, what knowest thou whom it may consume? Bring always as much water as thou canst to quench, but never bring one drop of oil to increase the flame." Not in a spirit of ill will, but earnestly, and as a Christian admonition, we entreat him to take this warning into his calmest and most serious consideration. Mr. Elliott is but half a Radical; for in the fiercest of his effusions there is an avowal of Christian belief. Is it too late for him to ask himself, as he formerly asked Lord Byron,

Digitized by Google

"Did God to thee
Impart a ray of that divinity
Whence burn the universal suns of space,
And glows the soul in every seraph's face,
To light thee in the darkness of thy deeds,
And aid the blow from which a brother bleeds?
Reprove, if thou art sinless, child of earth!
But, danger-nurs'd, and sightless from thy birth,
Judge *not* thy brethren! for their Sire is thine,
And 'vengeance,' saith the God of all, 'is mine!'"

Giaour, p. 147.

Let him examine his own writings and his own feelings by the test of that faith which he professes,—of that book which he believes. We should be sorry to consider him as one to whom

"Instruction
Comes like sweet showers to over-harden'd ground;
They wet, but pierce not deep."

Repulsive, and even hateful as his invectives are, it is not difficult to perceive where the root of his error lies; and that the root is good, though it is upon a worse than Upas graft, a graft of Zaccoum—the Tree of Hell, that it now bears poisonous fruit! He has "considered all the oppressions which are done under the sun,"

Digitized by Google

and "the tears of such as are oppressed and have no comforter;" he has regarded those "of whose labour there is no end;" and those also "whose insatiable eye no riches can satisfy." But the light which leads him astray, is not "a light from heaven"! He has not borne in mind the monitory words of the Preacher, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God."—The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry." If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter, for "He that is higher than the highest regardeth." "Is it strange," he says, "that my language is fervent as a welding heat, when my thoughts are *passions*, that rush burning from my mind, like white-hot bolts of steel?" And is it strange, we would ask, if one who lets these fiery passions take the place of thought, should be misled by them? Alas! error is never so dangerous as when it obtains full possession of an ardent mind and a benevolent heart. The moral and intellectual state which renders it so is well described in some stanzas, which we may be allowed here to transcribe, from an unpublished poem:*

* The Minstrel of the City, by Mr. John Bull.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Elliott will recognise the truth, and admire the strength of the delineation.

"His mind was apprehensive from the first;
'Twas melancholy; but 'twas also more;
Not timid, but in mood appalling nurst,
And which for sympathy did vainly implore;
The souls of none around could sink or soar
Near to the height or depth wherein he dwelt.
His thoughts walked in strangs paths; to him earth wore
New forms, and his imagination dwelt
With fancies and with fears which others never felt.

"These made him from his childhood upward seem
Wilful or sullen, gay or passionate,
Without all cause, as other minds would deem,
Because on them the readiest thoughts await;
But his came from afar, and held debate
With all they met, dark-lowering in their pride,
And arrogant and fierce from power innate,
And, till by truth directed, erring wide,
Sowing regret, and shame, and thousand ills beside.

"Mourn ye the minstrel; for before his soul,
Ere principles of truth take firmest hold,
Strong visions of endazzling falsehood roll,
And lying hopes that do their forms enfold

Digitized by Google

In outward garb of truth; and fancies bold,
And images of things of awful mien,
And speculation which may not be told;
Such were the things by Morna's spirit seen;
Mourn him,—but marvel not that he so strange
hath been."

That there are great and crying evils, by which the social system of this country is at this time deformed and disgraced, and disturbed and endangered, we are as deeply convinced as Mr. Elliott himself; and from the commencement of this Journal, that conviction has been declared in its pages. That many of these evils are remediable, we also believe; nor have we failed to point out such remedial means as might be pursued without danger in the process, and with the best probability of eventual success. That the poor are too poor is a truth which we have proclaimed as loudly as the "Cornlaw Rhymes," but in a different spirit and in a different tone; and that there are cases in which the rich are too rich, because, in proportion to the growth of their riches, is the consequent increase of poverty and wretchedness, is another and not less momentous truth, which it would be worse than folly to dream of concealing, while that poverty and that wretchedness are "trumpet-tongued" in pro-

Digitized by Google

claiming it. Upon these points there is a general agreement between Conservatives and Destructives—appellations in which all former distinctions of Whig and Tory, Ultras and Radicals, High and Low Church, Churchmen and Dissenters, may be merged. But, though there is this agreement, the appellations themselves are not more opposed than the practical conclusions which each would deduce from the admitted premises.

Let us hear the "Declaration of the Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society":—

"Convinced that the mechanics are the only body of men in this country sufficiently independent to oppose, with any chance of success, the host of corruptionists who are feeding on our labour, and, at the same time, limiting the market for our productions; trusting also that we shall speedily be joined by every wise and good mechanic in the empire, and supported by the yet undebased portion of the middle class of our countrymen, if any such there be,—We, the Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society, declare, that, in a fully-peopled country, it is an act of national suicide to restrict the exchange of manufactured goods for corn; because, where there is a law which restricts the necessaries and

Digitized by Google

comforts of life, profits and wages, being no where worth more than the necessaries and comforts which they will purchase, are demonstrably measured by the restriction;—That the present Cornlaw, while it enables a few thousand landed annuitants to convert the general loss into a temporary but ultimately fatal gain to themselves, is destructive of everything which is valuable to us as men; and that, while that law, and the will and power to alter it for the worse, continue as they are, no reduction of taxation, how extensive so ever, can be other than a mere transfer of a certain amount of the public money from the government to the landlords. We therefore further declare, That, as we cannot escape from the consequences of the Cornlaw, (except by causing it to be repealed, or by emigrating with our heart-broken wives and children,) we will, by all the legal means in our power, oppose the horrible anti-profit law, *alias* Cornlaw; and never remit in our exertions until the monopoly of the first necessary of life be utterly destroyed. The case of our oppressors, as stated by themselves, furnishes unanswerable reasons why we ought no longer to maintain them in their present character of palaced paupers. They say they cannot live without alms. If the assertion be true, why do they not go to the workhouse for

Digitized by Google

their pay as other paupers do? If it be not true, why are they not sent to the tread-mill for obtaining money under false pretences? *These questions suggest two others.* We, however, insist not yet on compensation for the past.

"JOHN CARR, Secretary."—Pp. 55, 56.

Let us hear also the comments upon the Declaration, as annexed to it by the Society's laureat:—

"When the Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society was first instituted, the members, in common with most of their countrymen, had almost ceased to hope for a reform in parliament. Determined to invite the legal co-operation of all the oppressed throughout the kingdom, they formed themselves into an association, with the design of attacking a particular point in the enemy's line. By overthrowing the Cornlaws, they knew they would compel their enemies themselves to become reformers. The announcement of the Reform Bill, in the infancy of their union, induced them to suspend their operations. Had not that announcement been made, the Society would at this time, I doubt not, have influenced, as members and co-operators, at least five hundred thousand adult males! They who doubt this

Digitized by Google

startling assertion, will make what allowance they please for the exaggeration of a poetical imagination; but I beg of them to remember, that the Birmingham Political Union originally consisted of four members only.

"Should the Reform Bill disappoint our just expectations, the Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society is still in existence. It may yet be necessary to array a Political Union of all the plundered against all the thieves; and I must, in candour say, that it will not be the fault of the latter, if the very next contest which history will have to record, will not be that of the People of Great Britain *v.* Fifty Thousand Palaced Paupers In fact, that contest is already begun. What is the struggle which now agitates the empire, but the beginning of the end—the great question of profit and wages, *alias* bread, bread, bread,—and whether the Tories, by continuing to tax it, shall destroy the nation with themselves? One would think, the answer cannot much longer be doubtful—NO!"—Pp. 56, 57.

Further. Mr. Elliott says,—

"I cannot conclude without a few remarks on the present state of the trade of Sheffield, as connected with the tendency of the Cornlaws. The

Digitized by Google

Germans, being able to buy the necessaries of life without restriction, are becoming dangerous competitors to us; but, in consequence of the troubles on the Continent, our merchants have lately received many orders, which, in other circumstances, would have been executed abroad; and the great and sudden demand for our goods has caused a general strike for increased wages. The present glut of orders, then, is an accident; but gluts and scarcities generally are the results of absurd legislation; and I might assert, without fear of refutation, that if trade were universally free, neither gluts or scarcities could, to any great extent, or for any great length of time, exist. *This, then, is the favourable moment for the repeal of the Cornlaws.* If we wait until the Continent is pacified, and our rivals enter again into active competition with us, the advance which has here taken place in wages will be another premium in their favour. But who does not see, that until the Cornlaws are repealed, *the great question of wages can never be settled in England?*—that gluts must alternate with scarcities?—gluts of orders with gluts of goods?—that the feast of to-day must be followed by the famine of to-morrow?—insolence by humiliation, humiliation by insolence?—and that, with the intemperance and want of forethought, resulting from the absence of a *steady*

Digitized by Google

demand for goods, the conflicts and heart-burnings of the employers and the employed must continue? But how long will such a state of things yet last? Can we compete for ever with un-bread-taxed rivals? No! capital will go where it will pay: skill will follow capital; and our manufactories will at length stop, simultaneously, and for ever! The immense camp of London will then be *without pay;* the immense camp of Glasgow will be *without pay;* the immense camp of the West-Riding of Yorkshire will be *without pay,*—and almost within shout of a still more multitudinous camp—that of Lancashire, also *without pay!* And all this may happen; and, if the Cornlaws remain much longer on the statute-book, *will* happen, perhaps in one and the same week, day, or hour! If I am called upon to produce from history a record of similar catastrophes, I shall answer, that history can furnish no record of *a similar state of things.* The British Government is the only one that ever legislated *against* the bread of its people, by impeding the exchange of manufactured goods for food, at the very moment when such exchange ought to have been facilitated by all possible or conceivable means."— Pp. 52, 54.

The part of Mr. Elliott's volume from whence these passages are extracted, is inscribed to "all

Digitized by Google

who revere the memory of our second Locke, Jeremy Bentham, and advocate the greatest happiness of the greatest number for the greatest length of time." But it is not among the professors of Jeremy-Benthamism that those persons are to be found who plead for, and labour for, the good of their fellow-creatures with enlarged and enlightened benevolence. The views of such persons extend something further than death and dissection; in their philosophy, the eternal interests of mankind are taken into the account! *

* It is remarkable that Mr. Southey omits the "Village Patriarch," first published four years before the Cornlaw Rhymes.

Digitized by Google

TRUTH MORE STRANGE THAN FICTION.

Scene—A wide plain, covered with skeletons and snow.

Enter PAYALL *and* ALLBELLY.

Payall. Heart of mud, and brain of steel!
What hast thou been doing?

Allbelly. Calming tumult, curing ruin—
Eating children, fathers, mothers,
Nieces, nephews, sisters, brothers;
Heap'd thousands at a meal.

Payall. All-maw! all-cursing! all-accurs'd!
Thou'rt loathsome as thy food.

Allbelly. I eat them up, to do them good;
To do them good, I starve them first.
To plunder is to bless,
To murder is to save:
What could men less, in thankfulness,
Than feed this living grave?
But not their flesh alone
Doth my vast hunger need;
On torture's groan, on famine's moan,
On mute despair I feed:
My fateless greed
Their all of life controls;
I eat their souls.

The plain is suddenly darkened, and a gigantic Shadow enters, deepening the gloom.

Digitized by Google

Shadow. [*To Allbelly.*] Eternal Stink! where are my children?

Allbelly. Here.

Shadow. Where?

Allbelly. I am they.

Shadow. Maggot! hast thou no fear of me?

Allbelly. Thee? I am Maggot.

Shadow. [*To Payall.*] Misery!
Hast thou no hope?

Payall. None, none,—nor trust in thee:
Why should I have, if thou permitt'st to be
That loathsome monster? or a thing like me?

*** I am indebted for this drama to T. et P. of L., near Sheffield, Esq.; for it originated in a conversation which I lately had with that gentleman in a railway carriage, when Landlordism in Ireland was destroying its victims by hundreds of thousands! he asserting the worn-out and infernal blasphemy, That the Corn-laws were enacted to benefit the consumers! One would think that our Protectionists (if they are, as they seem never tired of proving, at once, the worst and the most insolent of criminals,) might be satisfied with having escaped hanging; yet they continue to act as if they thought themselves still privileged to outrage the common sense of every victim whom they have not yet quite succeeded in stamping into the grave!

August 21st, 1847.

Digitized by Google

ERIN, A DIRGE, FOR APRIL, 1847.

1.

Oh, for snow, strange April snow,
Cold and cheap! a shroud of woe
For pale dead Erin's nakedness!
Snow-clad Broom, oh, drooping broom,
Hearse of snow, of plumes a plume,
Weep over Erin coffinless!

2.

There are colder things than snow,
Sadder things than death and woe,
Proud Rapine's cold hardheartedness!
And that saddest, helpless pain
Which, when struck, strikes not again!
Now wordless, lifeless, coffinless.

3.

Insect, that would'st God enthrall!
Earning nought, and taking all!
Art thou thy country's nothingness?
Man! whom that vile insect's will
Yet may torture, starve, and kill!
Remember Erin coffinless.

4.

How men treat subjected man,
When they may do what they can,

Digitized by Google

Well knows scourg'd India's wofulness;
Well, Bengal, thy famish'd dead
(Victim-myriads o'er thee spread!)
Forespoke of Erin coffinless.

5.

Oh, thou snow-clad forest-bough!
In thy sun-lit glory now,
Laugh not at death's wide wastefulness;
But lament, while brightly glows
April's noon o'er Winter snows,
A nation dead and coffinless!

6.

And—oh! pale unshrouded one,
Cover'd by the heav'ns alone!
A white sheet now shall cover thee:
Help is vain, but help is nigh;
And thy friend, the pitying sky
Shall throw a cold sheet over thee.

TO THE DEVIL.

Sir! Parson Meek says—and I'm bamm'd
If that shows Christian spirit—
That save as flogger of the damn'd,
You've not a spark of merit.

Digitized by Google

" 'Tis well," your honour's thinking now,
" When such as he despise you ?"
Give us your hand, then ! and allow
An old friend to advise you.
Do not, as godliest souls require,
Be always scalding, skelping ;
And pickling sinful souls in fire,
Or listening to their yelping.
If when you dance, your merriest hops
Wheel round the young beginner ;
If when you choose your whipping tops,
You pick the weakest sinner ;
If such sad doings are your jokes,
You'd best relax your rigour,
Or in the eyes of decent folks,
You'll cut a sorry figure ;
And by and by, the imps who run,
Through every grade of curship,
And thrive by drowning cats for fun,
Will scorn your honour's worship.

Digitized by Google

SAY "NO!" AND LIE.

Said he that we are loath'd, abhorr'd?
That Britain's name is now a word
For scorn to spit on?
Can it be true, that for the right
Poles, Germans, Romans, Magyars fight,
And not one Briton?
To wrong the right, and raise the wrong,
Against the weak, we aid the strong!

Digitized by Google

LECTURES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A LECTURE ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT POETRY IS SELF-COMMUNION.

WRITTEN FOR THE HULL MECHANICS' INSTITUTE, BY EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

YOUNG MEN !—Poets, it is said, know nothing. What, then, can they teach? Nothing, of course, if the saying is true; but, assuming to be teachers, they may choose subjects on which something may be said by people who know nothing; and in this way, I believe, much business is done. I may be wrong in my opinions on that something, or that nothing, which is called poetry; but I have endeavoured to be right; and what I shall say to you on this occasion is my own, or made such by reflection, for I take no man's opinions on trust. I come, then, to tell you what poetry is—not what that word is—for, not having learned Greek, I don't know; and, if I tell you anything about poetry but what you have already felt to be true, I am unfit to address you on the subject: for what is poetry—what can it be—but the heart speaking to itself? This principle of *earnest self-communion*—on which all composition

Digitized by Google

purporting to be poetry must stand, or, wanting it, fall—I now purpose to elucidate and confirm by examples; because it has been asserted by a great philosopher,* that poetry has no fixed principles—as if anything could exist without them; because a great living poet,† whose example refutes his theory, declares, if I understand him, that poetry is distinguished from prose by being written in verse, or, in other words, that verse is essential to poetry; and because the history of modern poets, as such, is the history of the revival of poetry in Britain, their distinguishing characteristic being poetry, or earnest common sense—whereas, some of their predecessors often wrote that dullest commonplace which common sense laughs to scorn. Now, this effect must have had a cause; for, as the earth could not move an inch, as a watch could not go at all, in opposition to the indisputable will of God, as declared in his mechanical laws—so *only on the axis of its principle* can move the universe of poetry, representing the Most High in the heart of man.

When a poet, ceasing to commune with himself, addresses others, he may be eloquent, but he is no longer poetical, unless he forget his audience; and in that case he is addressing him-

* Adam Smith. † James Montgomery.

Digitized by Google

self, and not others. I never read a poet, from John Milton to Robert Nicol, who does not, negatively or positively, exemplify the principle that poetry is self-communion. Almost every page of Byron's "Don Juan" exemplifies it in both ways, and the writings of Moore too often in one way only. I think I shall be able to show you why it is that some ostentatious men of the highest talent cannot write a word of genuine poetry, while honest, modest, unpretending men utter it to their hearts every day of their lives.

But I must now bespeak your merciful consideration. I am not an actor. I came to read, not to impersonate. Unluckily, too, or luckily, perhaps, I am told by my fireside critics, that I do not *read* poetry, but *sing* it to a bad tune. I can, however, give reasons for the faith that is in me. Why should rhymes be written, if they are not to be made sensible to the ear? It is hard to deprive the poet of his music, often the only thing the poor fellow has of his own.

"Glory to God, and to the Empress! Ismail is ours!" Thus wrote Suwarrow to his petticoated master. "Powers Eternal! such names mingled!" says Byron. "These are the most tremendous words, since Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Upharsin, that ever were written of swords." And who that remembers the impious dispatch,

Digitized by Google

does not utter this sentiment in his soul? *It is true poetry.* But when Byron goes on to say, as he does immediately afterwards, "that what Daniel read is short-hand of the Lord's;" and "that Suwarrow wrote his dispatch as a Polar melody, and set it," &c., he may be witty, but for a moment he ceases to be a poet, and becomes a mere vain man, seeking the applause of others, with a misgiving in his bosom that he does not deserve it. Not so, when he continues, "I will teach the *stones* to rise against earth's tyrants." He is then again a poet—he puts his head into his pocket, and lets his heart speak.

"When the dance gaed through the lighted ha'"—and, "though this lady was fair, and yon lady was braw, and that lady the toast of a' the town"—poor Burns said in his heart, "Ye are na Mary Morrison," the words he uttered were of the very essence of poetry, *because his heart spoke them to itself.*

When a husband, already widowed in soul, bends over the bed of the dying mother of his children, and, without uttering a single audible syllable, addresses to her every mournful and endearing epithet, his heart is conversing with itself—that is to say, with God, in the depths of our nature; and his feelings are poetry, because there can be no insincerity, no reserve about them,

Digitized by Google

no possible misgiving, no starting back from the arms of Truth. They are poetical as the reply to them—the last wordless *heart's look* of the dying.

Orators sometimes unconsciously become poets. O'Connell was a great poet when Stanley said to him, "I love Ireland as well as you do," and the "man of men," pausing for a moment, replied, "I check myself—I will not utter another burning word; he who *loves* Ireland, cannot hate *me*. Let our hearts shake hands."

There is a passage in one of Scott's novels, which finely exhibits the poetry of the heart, struggling with circumstance, and controlled by that feeling of deference which power and rank command: it is that passage in which Jeanie Deans implores the Queen of George II. to intercede with him for the life of her sister, Effie:—

"How did you travel up from Scotland, young woman?" said the Queen to Jeanie.

"Upon my foot mostly, madam."

"What! all that immense way on foot! How far can you walk in a day?"

"Five and twenty miles, and a bittock."

"I thought I was a good walker; but this shames me sadly."

"May your Leddyship never hae sae weary a heart, that ye canna be sensible o' the weariness

Digitized by Google

o' the limbs. I would have gone to the ends of the earth to save the life of John Porteous, or any other man in his unhappy condition. He is dead, and gane to his place. But my sister—my poor sister Effie—still lives, though her days and hours are numbered. She still lives, and a word of the King's mouth might restore her to a broken-hearted old man, who never forgot to pray that his Majesty might be blessed with a long and prosperous reign, and that his throne, and that of his posterity, might be established in righteousness. O Madam, if ye ever kenn'd what it was to sorrow for and with a sinful and suffering creature, whose mind is sae tossed that she can neither be called fit to live or die, have some compassion on our misery! Save an honest house from dishonour, and an unhappy girl not eighteen years of age from an early and dreadful death. Alas! it is not when we sleep soft and wake merrily ourselves that we think on other people's sufferings. Our hearts are waxed light within us then, and we are for righting our ain wrangs and fighting our ain battles. But when the hour of trouble comes—and seldom may it visit your Leddyship!—and when the hour of death comes, that comes to high and low—and long and late may it be yours!—oh, my Leddy, then it is nae what we hae done for oursels, but what we hae

Digitized by Google

done for others, that we think on maist pleasantly. And the thought that ye hae interfered to save the poor thing's life, will be sweeter in that hour, come when it may, than if a word of your mouth could hang the whole Porteous mob at the tail of ae tow."

This is poetry and eloquence—the heart and the head—the soul's self-communion, and the mind addressing another.

Perhaps there is nothing in the world so poetical as the love of a mother for her child; it is altogether unreserved. Honesty is always poetical, because it is in earnest—it means what it says—it does what it has to do with its whole heart—in word and deed, it is sincere. And whoever inspects human nature closely, will find that the least trust-worthy is the least poetical of his acquaintance; because to him the love of the true, the beautiful, the good, if it visit him at all, is a bird of passage—it is seldom homed, never bosomed with him. Poetry, then, is sincerity *in earnest—impassioned* truth—*the heart*, not the head, *speaking to itself*. If you think I am wrong, read for yourselves the introductory lines of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," which remarkably confirm my opinion; our second Shakspere having entered into the feelings of his old bard, with all the heart's unreserve and self-forgetfulness.

Digitized by Google

But we will now ask the *dead who cannot die,* what two things differ more than the poetry of truth, and that of convention? "Here oft," says Burns—

"Here oft, by sweet endearing stealth,
Shall meet the loving pair,
Despising worlds and all their wealth,
As empty, idle care.
The flowers shall vie, in all their charms,
The hour of heaven to grace,
And birks extend their fragrant arms,
To screen the dear embrace.
Here, haply, too, at vernal morn,
Some musing bard may stray,
And eye the smoking dewy lawn,
And misty mountain grey."

Contrast, now, these simple lines with a far-famed passage from Moore:—

"Now over Syria's land of roses
Softly the light of eve reposes,
And, like a glory, the broad sun
Hangs over sainted Lebanon,
Whose head in wintry grandeur towers
And whitens with eternal sleet;
While Summer, in a vale of flowers,
Is sleeping rosy at his feet."

This description must have great merit of some

Digitized by Google

sort, for it has been praised as far as our language is known; but, with the exception of one word from Milton, and another from Homer, it is not poetry, for it is not truth, The light of evening is light in transition, not in repose, for repose is rest. The remaining lines (though three of them, if they stood alone, are good) do not convey to my mind any adequate idea of a mountain older than death, frowning over the stern wildness of arid and sun-smitten regions, spread in immensity beneath and around. Moore was not writing from the heart, nor for it, when he compounded this description. It is precisely such a one as a man of extraordinary cleverness, without a single home-thought in his soul, or an atom of poetry in his nature, might have made to order, and per receipt and inventory. It is as pretty as if it had this moment been taken out of a French milliner's sample-box of artificial flowers, newly scented. But I do not like dead things, not even roses. If Moore's National Melodies themselves are without vitality, and if the author of such things can conquer time, what writer need fear oblivion? I cannot help feeling, when I read his "Loves of the Angels," that, if it had been fashionable in his time for men to wear false hair and ribbons, he would have placed on the heads of his celestial dandies, periwigs of the most approved twizzle,

Digitized by Google

and on each wing, a shoulder-knot of the best-bred pink and blue. I grant his inimitable instinct of versification; but the noblest poetry under heaven, in the prose of the Bible, laughs to scorn the rhymester's skill; and I contend that the versifying and the poetic power are frequently found in inverse ratios to each other. The perusal of Moore's compositions, in prose and verse alike, is to me a humiliating task, like that of a full-grown man-child, listlessly seeking, in a box filled with moss, for pretty insects, not worth finding. How unlike him are earnest, conscientious Cowper, and fervid, intense, passion-souled, *all-hearted* Burns!

It is impossible, however, not to admire the elegance of the lines which, for two reasons, I have quoted from Moore. Many persons suppose that elegance is essential to the perfection of poetical composition; but, so far is this from being the case, that beauty itself is not essential to poetry, except inasmuch as beauty is truth. Poetry, like truth, is a common flower. God has sown it over the earth, like his daisies, sprinkled with tears or glowing in the sun, even as he places the crocus and the March frosts together, "and beautifully mingles life and death." Wherever there are hearts that can feel, it is found—in the budding rose and the fading leaf, in the palace

Digitized by Google

and the cottage, in the workshop and the jail. Hearken, and I will recite to you a poem of God's making! But don't raise your expectations too high. It is only too true a tale of a young woman who became an inmate of a workhouse, after having known better days. She had saved from the wreck of her prosperity a silk gown, which she was allowed to keep locked in a box, and which she carefully examined every day. At the end of about three years, she was observed, with the gown in her hands, rushing from the place where it was usually deposited, and exclaiming, "O poor Jane! what wilt thou do?" She had discovered in the gown a failing thread. Nobody else could perceive it. Raising the gown in her trembling hands, she asked her companions in misfortune, if the thread would break. From that fatal day, she put the same question to every person who entered the workhouse. She put it to me, not many days before she died; for, whenever she could get out of the house, she wandered in the neighbouring lanes, muttering, in a whisper, "O poor Jane! what wilt thou do?" and if a passenger approached, she would look up earnestly in his face, and, placing her finger under the failing thread, ask him if it would break. "Will it break? Oh, *will* it break?" Alas! it broke! And with it broke her heart.

Digitized by Google

For the last link which bound her affections to the beautiful past, in which alone she lived, was broken; her sole dependence was a thread—and it failed! But the grave did not refuse her an asylum: she died, I am sorry to say, by her own hand. Now, though any workhouse could furnish incidents as affecting as these, let me not be told that, if no man had condescended to speak or write a word about them, they would not still have been, in principle, genuine poetry. How could they have been otherwise, written as they were and are, by our Almighty Father himself, on his tablet of the universe? Think you the record would perish, if it did not bear man's sign manual? Think you that God turns in disgust from the memorial of his desolate daughter's sufferings, to look on the blood-stained trophies of a Wellington, or the tawdry splendours of a Heliogabalus? No, no. When He required of her the failing thread, she had nothing left but Him and the grave; and He makes no erring estimate of the widow's mite, when, willingly or unwillingly, she casts into the treasury all she hath.

We have heard much of the dependence of poetry on style. But poetry is independent of language itself. The heart which a thread broke proves this. Indeed, that style which is called

Digitized by Google

poetical, is by no means peculiar to verse; and, in prose and verse alike, nine times in ten, it is disjoined from poetry. To show you that the poetry which has found words, depends not on style but on sentiment, allow me to quote from the New Testament a few words known to you all:—

"And, as Paul spake for himself, Festus said, with a loud voice, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.'

"But *he* said, 'I am not *mad*, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for these things were not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.'

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, 'Almost thou persuadest *me* to be a Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, *except these bonds*.'"

This, you will say, is prose; but I say it is dramatic poetry, the poetry of action. Now, it might be the *language* of action without being poetry, just as a prosaic lecture becomes dramatic without being poetical, if the audience loudly

Digitized by Google

praise or loudly blame it; for, while they give the lecturer time to breathe by interrupting him, they dramatise his discourse, making it for the moment a part of themselves, and, though dead, a living thing. But, if the language of Paul might be that of action, without being poetry, what constitutes it poetry? The last three words—"except these bonds." Plainer words were never used; but they were spoken from the heart, by a man who had suffered injustice, a man whose wisdom was not derived from books, but *written on his heart* by the finger of God.

I hold in my hand a true poem, which the heart of an American bard has sent to mine, on the wings of the press, over 3000 miles of sea:—

"Come home!
Come to the hearts that love thee—to the eyes
That beam in brightness, but to gladden thine;
Come where fond thoughts like holiest incense rise,
Where cherish'd Memory rears her altar's shrine!
Come to the hearth-stone of thy early days;
Come to the ark, like the o'er-wearied dove;
Come with the sunlight of thy heart's warm rays;
Come to the fireside circle of thy love!
Brother, come home!
It is not home without thee! the lone seat
Is still unclaim'd where thou wast wont to be;
In every echo of returning feet,
In vain we list to what should herald thee.

Digitized by Google

Would I could send my spirit o'er the deep,
Would I could wing it like a bird to thee,
To commune with thy thoughts, to fill thy sleep
With these unwearying words of misery—
Brother, come home!"

But this true poem is not all poetry. It is least effective where most poetical, as the saying is. The fifth line is pompous nonsense. The eighth is not even head-work—it is elbow-work; a tailor might have forked it out of a dictionary with his bodkin. The words, "Brother, come home! it is not home without thee!" are worth all the rest of the poem—they are the poem; Shakspeare would have written *them* only.

Wordsworth declares, in his celebrated preface, that it is the business of poetry to represent the shows of things—not things as they are, but as they seem to be. Luckily, however, for him and us, his practice proves that it is the business of poetry to represent the realities of things, by speaking from the heart with all sincerity. But I will quote from him by and by; for, since I came into this town, a poem has been put into my hands by a gentleman present, which is full of home-truths, so affectingly real, that I think no person, after hearing it, can be in doubt as to what it is that constitutes poetry, and "passeth show."

Digitized by Google

LINES ON A STATUE OF HIS DEAD CHILD.

BY RICHARD LANE, ESQ.

I saw thee in thy beauty! Bright phantom of the past,
I saw thee for a moment—'twas the first time and the last;
And, though years since have glided by of mingled bliss and care,
I never have forgotten thee, thou fairest of the fair!

I saw thee in thy beauty! Thou wast graceful as the fawn,
When, in wantonness of glee, it sports along the lawn;
I saw thee seek the mirror—and when it met thy sight,
The very air was musical with thy burst of wild delight.

I saw thee in thy beauty! with thy sister at thy side—
She a lily of the valley, thou a rose in all its pride;
I looked upon thy mother—there was triumph in her eyes;
And I trembled for her happiness, for grief had made me wise.

I saw thee in thy beauty! with one hand among her curls—
The other with no gentle grasp had seized a string of pearls;
She felt the pretty trespass, and she chid thee, though she smiled;
And I knew not which was loveliest—the mother or the child.

Digitized by Google

I saw thee in thy beauty! and a tear came to mine eye,
As I press'd thy rosy cheek to mine, and thought even thou could'st die:
My home was like a summer bower, by thy joyous presence made,
But I only saw the sunshine, and felt alone the shade.

I *see* thee in thy beauty! for there thou seem'st to lie,
In slumber resting peacefully!—but, oh, the change of eye—
That still serenity of brow—those lips that breathe no more—
Proclaim thee but a mockery of what thou wast before.

I see thee in thy beauty! with thy waving hair at rest,
And thy *busy* little fingers folded lightly on thy breast;
But thy merry *dance* is over, and thy little *race* is run,
And the mirror that reflected two, can now give back but one.

I see thee in thy beauty! with thy mother by thy side—
But her loveliness is faded, and quell'd her glance of pride;
The smile is absent from her lip, and absent are the pearls,
And a cap almost of widowhood conceals her envied curls.

I see thee in thy beauty! as I saw thee on that day—
But the mirth that gladden'd then my home, fled with thy life away;
I see thee lying motionless upon th' accustomed floor,
But my heart hath blinded both my eyes, and I can see no more.

Digitized by Google

The departure of Paul from Miletus, as related in the Acts of the Apostles, is genuine narrative poetry. What constitutes it such? Its earnest truth. I am not acquainted with any composition in prose or verse, that more beautifully illustrates the goodness of God, in the use of that great instrument of his mercy, pain. Is not labour His right hand? Are not all our virtues born of those necessities, which He has not inflicted, but bestowed? So thought he "who coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel, but laboured with his hands to support the weak; remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" "Ye know," said Paul, "from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you in all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility and with many tears; and how I kept back nothing that was profitable to you, but taught you publicly and from house to house. And now, behold! I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city that bonds and affliction abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus,

Digitized by Google

to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold! I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdon of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure; for I have not shunned to declare unto you *all* the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers; for I know this, that, after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter among you, not sparing the flock. Therefore watch, and remember that for the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one of you day and night with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all thing, how that so labouring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he

Digitized by Google

spoke, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."

When I say that verse is not poetry, and that prose may be, I utter no paradox, nor have I any cause to gain, any battle to win; for poetry wins its own battles. This age, fertile in great poets, may not have produced one who is singly equal to Shakspeare; but it has produced two, whose joint merits are a counterpoise to Shakspeare's utmost worth—Scott, in characterisation and poetry; and Bulwer, in poetry, intellectuality, wit, and felicity of expression. The author of "Eugene Aram" is a great epic poet. His novels abound in poetry, that speaks, like Scott's, through the heart to the eye, and, like Dante's, to the inmost soul.

Take example from his "Rienzi," describing the page of that personage, hastening, too late, to beg the life of his father, whom he himself had, in ignorance, betrayed:—

"As one frantic, as one whom a fiend possesses or pursues, he rushed from the convent, he flew through the desolate streets. The death-bell came, first indistinct, then loud, upon his ear. Every sound seemed to him like the curse of God; on, on—he passed the more deserted quarter; crowds swept before him—he was mingled with the living stream—delayed, pushed

Digitized by Google

back — thousands on thousands, around, before him. Breathless, gasping, he still pressed on—he forced his way—he heard not—he saw not—all was like a dream. Up burst the sun over the distant hills!—the bell ceased! From right to left he pushed aside the crowd; his strength was as a giant's. He neared the fatal spot. A dead hush lay like a heavy air over the multitude. He heard a voice as he pressed along, deep and clear—it was the voice of his father!—it ceased—the audience breathed heavily—they murmured—they swayed to and fro. On, on, went Angelo Villani. The guards of the senator stopped his way; he dashed aside their pikes—he eluded their grasp—he pierced the armed barrier—he stood on the Place of the Capitol. 'Hold, hold!' he would have cried—but his tongue clove to his lips. He beheld the gleaming axe—he saw the bended neck. Ere another breath passed his lips, a ghastly and trunkless face was raised on high—Walter de Montreal was no more!

"Villani saw — swooned not—shrunk not—breathed not!—but he turned his eyes from that lifted head, dropping gore, to the balcony, in which, according to custom, sate, in solemn pomp, the senator of Rome—and the face of that young man was as the face of a demon!

"'Ha!' said he, muttering to himself, and

Digitized by Google

recalling the words of Rienzi, seven years before, *'Blessed art thou who hast no blood of kindred to avenge!'"*

Almost all Barry Cornwall's serious lyrics confirm the principle that poetry is self-communion. How many hopeless idlers, trading gamblers, lovers who dare not tell their loves, and mourners whose loves are in the grave—how many reckless and desperate, and broken and breaking hearts, are there at this moment around us, all eagerly, but each in its own way, drinking King Death's coal-black wine!

"King Death was a rare old fellow—
He sate where no sun could shine,
And stretched out his hand so yellow,
With a glass of his coal-black wine:
Hurrah! the coal-black wine!
There came to him many a maiden
Whose eyes had forgot to shine,
And widows with grief o'er-laden,
For a glass of his sleepy wine:
Hurrah! for the rare old fellow,
Who laugh'd till his eyes dropp'd brine,
As he stretched out his hand so yellow,
And pledg'd them in Death's dark wine:
Ha, ha! the coal-black wine!"*

* In some instances, as in this, I quote from memory, thinking it best to do so—the most vital part of an author being probably that which we remember.

Digitized by Google

Behold, with the eyes of your hearts, the statue of the dying gladiator, and then read Byron's description of it. They are *both* poetry. Is silence poetry, then? Oh, certainly. I am reading Byron's description now, in my soul, though to you I have not yet uttered a syllable of it.

"I see before me the gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand; his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony;
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low;
And, through his side, the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder shower;—and now
The arena swims around him—he is gone,
Ere ceas'd the shout that hail'd the wretch who won.
He heard it, but he heeded not—*his eyes*
Were with his heart, and *that* was far away;
But where his rude hut on the Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday!
All this gushed with his blood. Shall he expire,
And unavenged? 'Arise, ye Goths!'"

But this, you may say, is the poetry of noise. Why so? The words "Arise, ye Goths!" would be equally effective, if uttered in the lowest possible tone. The deep feeling of hatred which they breathe, might not actually have made its whisper

Digitized by Google

audible. Perhaps, the dying man could not have made it audible. But suppose yourselves present at the spectacle, with a brother of the Dacian, disguised among his enemies! How would he express those words? If sorrow and rage did not conquer prudence, he would choke them in his heart; but, if he forgot his danger, he would start up, the representative of indignant human nature, and, bidding long-outraged nations redress themselves, shout, as I have done, "Arise, ye Goths!" Two individuals, then, might recite this poetry differently, yet both well—that is to say each according to his nature? Certainly they might. Poetry, then, is not alike to all? Certainly it is not. To some persons it does not exist; to those *who have no hearts*, it is a nonentity. In matters of taste, then, let there be no dictation. Who shall tell that wonderful instrument, the human heart, in what particular key it shall play its tunes?

To show you that the stillest thoughts are often the deepest and the strongest, I will quote a few lines of *what is called* mere description, from the most thoughtful of poets—Wordsworth:—

> "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;
> The holy time is quiet as a nun
> Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
> Is sinking down in his tranquillity;

Digitized by Google

The gentleness of heav'n is on the sea:
Listen!—*the mighty Being is awake!*
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder, everlastingly."

One short extract more, from the same "mighty" poet, who, like the ocean he describes, speaketh "everlastingly:"—

"The clouds are split asunder, and I see
The clear moon, and the glory of the heavens.
There! in a black-blue vault she sails along,
Follow'd by multitudes of stars, that, small,
And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
Drive as she drives. How fast they wheel away,
Yet vanish not! The wind is in the tree,
But they are silent!—still they roll along,
Immeasurably distant; and the vault
Still deepens its unfathomable depth."

To me, these words express the very soul of the scenes described; and it is the power of expressing that soul which constitutes a man a poet. If you will look up *thoughtfully* to the heavens, on a clear but tempestuous night, "when the wind is in the tree, and the stars are silent," your minds will speak to your hearts, and the scene to both, and, for the moment, you will be sublime poets. *Every man* is poetical, when, feeling strongly, he reflects deeply. And if there are (which I doubt)

Digitized by Google

men who cannot communicate the soul's electricity to the souls of others—if the heart *ever* fails to make itself understood—depend upon it, there is some misgiving in the speaker, some want of sincerity, something reserved or suppressed. *Then* begins the "strife of poor humanity's afflicted will, struggling *in vain* with ruthless destiny;" and that strife constitutes the moral tragic, as opposed to the physical. "Black!" says Truth, smiling through her tears—"not yet, not yet, my poor child, can I take thee to my bosom. Repent! thou hast offended: the want of a single ray of light makes thee all darkness." Alas, young men! there are worse misfortunes than those which accident inflicts upon us—even those direst ones which our want of honesty inflicts upon ourselves!

To the principle that poetry is self-communion, perhaps you will still object, that there is one description of poetry—the metaphorical—to which it does not apply. But, unless a metaphor be sentimental—that is, unless it be, at least, an image and a sentiment—it cannot be poetical, though it may be illustrative. We *feel* the metaphor in Wordsworth, when he says of the placid sea, "The mighty Being *is awake*." The metaphor is perfect. It is an image, a thought, and a sentiment. To the perfection of a metaphor,

Digitized by Google

these *three* conditions are necessary—*it must be, at once, an image, a thought, and a sentiment:* and the more *complete* a metaphor is, the more *poetical* it is. No figurative author can live, unless his figures possess two of the three requisites; the metaphors of the highest minds possess them all. There are men without number who can pour out metaphors with amazing fluency, and such men are commonly mistaken for men of poetical minds: it would be as correct to say that ice is of the poetical temperament. Such men are utterly unimaginative, cold in heart, and barren of soul. Good writers and good speakers never use a metaphor, if plain words will express their meaning as briefly and as well. The late Lord Castlereagh, of liberal and diplomatic memory, was a metaphorical speaker; but his mind was not even "the mind of his own eyes"—his images were pictures of nothing—yet some of them have obtained notoriety, at least, if not fame; and they who never saw "the great *statesman* now no more," may remember his "fundamental feature." Truths which have become proverbs, are almost always expressed metaphorically. *Money makes the old mare trot.* The picture is before you! But why does money make the old mare trot? Because the mare cannot work without food, and food cannot be procured without an equivalent,

Digitized by Google

the representative of which is money. This proverb, then, possesses *two* of the conditions of vitality—*it is an image, and thought;* it speaks to the intellect, and to the fancy, *but not to the heart:* it is not poetry. But the kind-hearted among you can make *poetry* of it, by thinking of the cheerful gratitude of the poor old mare! Our greatest masters of metaphor in prose and verse, are Shakspeare, Junius, and a writer whom I will not name, because, though he is the author of one of the very best books in the world, it is doubted by some good men whether, on the whole, his writings have done good or harm. We all remember Shakspeare's "unwedgeable and gnarled oak." This metaphor "is not one," do you say? It is perfect, however, as Wordsworth's. *It is an image, a thought, and a sentiment.* It brings before the imagination the instruments and the action—before the mind, the stubborn texture of the substance acted upon—before the *heart,* the almost eternal struggle of the all but immortal tree with time and death. "The plumage of the noble bird," says Junius, when strangely endeavouring to prove that the trappings of royalty are necessary to the security of the throne—"The plumage of the noble bird supports his flight; strip him of his beauty, and you fix him to the earth." In this sentence he says

Digitized by Google

more, and says it better, than he could, *without the metaphor*, in ten times the number of words; and, the metaphor being perfect, is poetical in the highest degree. During the war of our oligarchy with the colonies, Lord Howe addressed a proclamation to the Americans, bemoaning the insulted dignity of the crown, (meaning the lords and squires,) but saying not a word about slaughtered brethren, widowed mothers, and orphan children. The nameless writer to whom I have alluded, and who was employed by congress to answer the proclamation, said, in reply, "He pities the plumage, but *forgets* the dying bird." The same author, having shown that governments hitherto have done more harm than good, and that, if men were wise and good, legislation would be unnecessary, says, "Government, like dress, is a badge of lost innocence: it is a temple built on the ruins of paradise." Need I now tell you that these prose metaphors are poetry? They want not the aid of verse to constitute them such; they require not rhyme to make them remembered; the world will not let them be forgotten: possessing all the three requisites of vitality, as metaphors, they are poetry in the highest; and, *therefore*, they can never die. Mere metaphors, then, are *not* poetry. On the contrary, those writers who use them most, are the unpoetical.

Digitized by Google

Their metaphors may hide the extent of their mental poverty, but cannot place before us, in mournful grandeur, that fallen angel "whose *stature* reached the sky, and on whose crest *sate horror plumed.*" It is easy to liken swiftness to a dove's wing; but to make poetry of the image, you must put your hearts into it; and the poetry will be none the worse if you put your heads into it also; for poetry is truth—the *heart's* truth. What were the words uttered by Mary of Scotland, when she first approached the window of her prison at Fotheringay? "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, *that I might flee away and be at rest!*" Is *this* poetry? Ay, and such poetry as is to be found only in the pages of inspiration. Perhaps the very highest poetry never yet found words—never yet was expressed metaphorically, or otherwise; for it is not the melodious sound, but the inexpressive feeling; not the angel's wing, but the truthful spirit, eternal in its truth. The Almighty himself may not have uttered it; but it is homed in our hearts, be they bad or good, if we have hearts, for truth is there undeceivable; yes, undeceivable, for, though the heart often deceives the head, no man's head ever yet, for a single moment, deceived his heart. Castlereagh's heart was not deceived, when conscience gave him a crimson necklace; Cardinal Beaufort's heart was

Digitized by Google

not deceived, when he died and made no sign. The truth was in their hearts, but in their hearts the truth was not hallowed; their wicked minds were always warned, and they believed—and, at last, they trembled. But now for the end. If it be sinful to waste anything, why should we waste this lecture? Young men! my hair is already grey. I have lived in eventful times, and witnessed marvellous changes. You will witness changes still more marvellous. William Hazlitt, *using a metaphor which is perfect*, said, *in prose which is poetry*—"That the great world of electricity lies all undiscovered before us; *like America, asleep for centuries by the side of her unconscious sister.*" It may not be in the destiny of any one of you, to invent and perfect a machine which shall be worked without cost by the electric fluid, and supersede the giant power of steam; but if, in my course through life, any truth has been more strongly impressed upon my mind than another, it is this—that (did they but know it) men possess collectively, and therefore individually, the greatest of all powers, except that of Him who is, and was, and shall be—I mean the power of co-operation. Use that power, as true poets write their verses, earnestly, and without selfishness; let the exercise of it be "its own exceeding great reward;" use it in a

Digitized by Google

manner worthy of the living image of the everlasting God, remembering that the great family of man is one family, and that God is its father. And then, if any true-hearted man tells you that he does not understand poetry, tell him, in reply, that it is the business of his life, and that he *practises* it every day. "For wisdom lives with children round her knees." And this will be the first great discovery which honest co-operation will enable you to make. The most valuable things in the world are men; and when the majority of you think so, wo be to them who shall dare to throw away a man! You will, then, hear no more of emigration-committees. But now, mark! He who compels, or willingly suffers, a human being to remain in ignorance, does much worse than throw away a man; he converts a man into a beast, fit only to beget creatures destined to live and perish miserably—creatures without *minds*, and therefore not men! In furtherance, then, of that co-operation which can alone put an end to such wickedness and misery, may God hallow and bless in your thoughtful hearts *the truth*, which is poetry; not that barren understanding which meaneth no evil, but that only fearless and truly pious one, *which meaneth good!* I must now conclude this long exemplification of a principle which is per-

Digitized by Google

haps of little importance, but which must be of some, or you would not have come to hear me talk about it. I thank you for your thanks, your applause—and your silence, the best applause; and surely I have reason to be proud and thankful, if I have at all deserved the approbation of the townsmen of Daniel Sykes and Andrew Marvel.

E. E.

Digitized by Google

A LECTURE ON THE POETS WHO SUCCEEDED MILTON, AND PRECEDED COWPER AND BURNS.

WRITTEN FOR THE SHEFFIELD MECHANICS' INSTITUTION.

YOUNG MEN!—When I last addressed you here—although my subject was a somewhat animating one—seven ladies honoured my narcotic powers by falling asleep; and if those ladies, when they awaked, had rewarded me with a hearty laugh, I should have thought that a compliment had been paid me, of which a dull lecturer might be reasonably proud. But whatever may be the qualifications of a lecturer, if the materials of his lecture are dull, how can the lecture itself be otherwise? I think, then, I may safely promise you a comfortable social nap on this occasion; for the poets who succeeded Milton, and preceded Cowper and Burns, lived in a dull and happy age—an age which was dull, because it was happy. In those days, the ratio of profit and wages on capital, skill, and labour, was not lessening, but increasing; men had not begun to bid against each other in desperate competition for less and less;

Digitized by Google

the battle of fifty dogs for one bone, and that bone a picked one, had not commenced; nor had it entered into the mind of any statesman to conceive, that such a battle would ever be fought here by act of parliament; nor had Time, the disturber, awaking France from the long slumber of despotism, and startling victims into avengers, as with the touch of Ithuriel's spear, shaken the mind from the depths of its stagnation, and become to Pope and his imitators, what the discovery of America was to Shakspeare and Bacon. The results were correspondent; and I shall not conclude this lecture without attemping to show, that Pope and his followers are essentially mannerists, undramatic and unideal. They chose bonds, for the sake of bondage. And I do not mean to say, that the self-will of poets, in their compositions, ought to be unrestrained by rules. But is there no difference between the earnestness of fools and wise men? He whose brains set his ears on fire, is no more a poet than he is Jeremy Bentham. But passion is to wisdom a higher wisdom. For reason, without emotion, is only the cold two-foot rule, which, measuring the feet of timber in a cedar, feels not the might, and majesty, and goodness of Him, who overshadows Lebanon with his delegated beauty.

The two great founders of what is called the

Digitized by Google

French school of English poetry, give us, in their descriptions of character, processes rather than revelations; while the bright impassioned reason of imaginative poets, like the sun shining on mossy rocks and dewy forests, invests their subjects in beauty, which, though magical in its effects, is not illusion, but truth. The history, then, of modern English poetry—I mean the poetry of the last fifty years—is the history of the revival of poetry in England; the history of the return of our poets to nature—to the ideal, the dramatic, the simple, the true—to what poetry was in its origin, and is in its essence.

From the death of Milton, "the poet of our republic," to the appearance of Cowper and Burns, English poetry declined as an art; but its flame was kept from extinction by a few writers of whom I am now to speak. Of Milton,—one of the most gentle, most beautiful, most manly, most accomplished, most severely tried of men—whose life was a long poem of misery—who dwelt with a congenial spirit but for one short year of his life—who died without receiving his fame—and of whom it is said by a great living writer, "that he was the poet of disappointment,"—of Milton I shall say little. But never, perhaps, was man so slandered as he has been, and is. Before he died, "his life's life was lied away;" and still the pure

Digitized by Google

spirit that conceived Comus, is painted as a demon; still the "homagers of tyrants" write his spotless name in gall. Though, perhaps, the world has never yet seen one man worthy to criticise his "Paradise Lost," the apes and the monkeys of criticism flippantly condemn its author; though absolutely nothing but good is known of *him*, still they speak of his *light* with tongues of darkness,—following the example of that egregious genius who is said to have described a door, with its bell and knocker, as "a ligneous barricado, with its tintinnabulary appendages." Milton has been called the last of the Elizabethan poets; but neither is he connected with, nor does he in the least resemble, any of the poets who preceded or followed him: he is of no school, and of no age. "His soul," says Wordsworth, "was like a star, and dwelt apart." But this also is a mistake. His soul was a patriot's, and dwelt with the great men of his time,—with Cromwell and Pym, Hampden and Vane; names which have been familiar to me as household words from my childhood; for my father's little preaching-parlour was hung round with the portraits of those men, and men like them; and when in after years I read an account of the heroes and sages whom Charles the First stopped in the Thames,

Digitized by Google

on their way to America, I was surprised to find that Milton, (then in his thirtieth year) was not one of them. You may read the account (and all tyrants should read it,) in Holme's "American Annals." "An order," he says, "was given by the privy-council in May, 1638, to take speedy and effectual course for the stay of eight ships, then in the Thames, prepared to sail for New England. By this order, Oliver Cromwell, Arthur Hazlerig, John Hampden, and other patriots, were prevented from coming to America. How limited is the foresight of man! how inscrutable are the councils of God! By this arbitrary measure, Charles forcibly detained the men destined to overturn his throne, and terminate his days by a violent death." Milton ought to have been—perhaps he was—one of those detained patriots; for he was a younger brother of those enlightened and intrepid Calvinists—the fathers of modern liberty—but for whom she would not now have been found on earth. Having given his patrimony to the commonwealth, he proudly earned his bread as a schoolmaster! Yes, for he was a patriot from a high sense of religious duty; and what is the "Paradise Lost" but a political treatise, depicting the Almighty as the arbiter of his community of good, and Satan as a tyrant from

Digitized by Google

the beginning? Yet, strange to say, he makes God a Tory, ruling under oligarchical forms—"Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms!"

From the death of the "Bard of our Republic," to the commencement of the first French Revolution, Great Britain and Ireland produced six poets—Pope, Young, Thomson, Goldsmith, Gray, and Collins. Do I, then, forget Otway, Congreve, Akenside? Was not Otway a genuine poet? Yes, and had he lived, (he died in his thirtieth year,) we should, perhaps, have had another Shakspeare. Congreve's "Mourning Bride," in its characters of Osmyn and Zara, gave Byron the germ of his "Corsair"; but I do not now intend to speak of the drama, except incidentally, in contrasting Pope with Shakspeare. But was not Akenside a poet? Yes, the poet of a trustful philosophy. But he did not *write* poetry. No? No. Perhaps he felt it; and he is the author of the noblest metrical oration in the world: but eloquence is *not* poetry. Sometimes, indeed, as I have shown, orators unconsciously become poets; but this happened seldom to the author of "The Pleasures of Imagination." His versification is the most elaborate in our language. With a Roman's heart he had the mind and tongue of a Greek; and his music is not, like Pope's, mere melody; in every page of his great work there are passages so exquisitely

Digitized by Google

harmonized, that, in reading them, we are compelled to say, in spite of our hearts, "Yes, Mark Akenside was a poet." "There is no art or mystery that requires so long an apprenticeship as this of verse-making," says Robert Southey, in one of his letters to me: See! how beautifully (in the only passage which I can afford to quote from the blank verse of the Bard of the Tyne) his repetitions of phrase balance each other, like corresponding sounds in rhyme!

> *Is aught so fair*
> In all the *dewy* landscapes of the spring,
> In the bright eye of Hesper or the morn,
> In Nature's fairest forms, *is aught so fair*
> As virtuous friendship? as the candid blush
> Of him who strives with fortune to be just?

Pope was a weakling and a cripple. He could not leap over five-barred gates—consequently, he could not excel in fox-hunting: so, to distinguish himself, he wrote an epic poem on a lady's curl. He was conversing with his heart, (such as it was,) when he wrote his Eloisa to Abelard, and his sofa-and-lap-dog poetry—for instance, his unique "Rape of the Lock"; masterpieces which, for *that* reason, *because his heart wrote them*, will never be excelled. Pope, writing rhymed epistles to his titled acquaintance, was not the genuine

Digitized by Google

poet, the man of genius conversing with his *heart*, but a man frozen, as it were, in a room full of strangers, with whom he could not sympathize; he was no longer the pellucid fountain, nor even the dewdrop frozen on the winter rose, but the stagnant fluid in the china vase, or the dull icicle of the town palace.

I have alluded to Milton, not without purpose; for, if he had not been one of the greatest of poets, he would still have been one of the greatest of versifiers. The melody of Pope differs as much from the harmony of Milton, as a flute differs from an organ, or a gilt pin from the steam-engine. Pope was the greatest of melodists, however, and only not a harmonist, because there are in his versification no differences to reconcile. He is also the most condensed of poets; and his English is unrivalled in purity even by the prefaces of Dryden, of whom he has been falsely called an imitator. He wrote, indeed, in the heroic couplet, the easiest of our measures, as Dryden did before him, and as Chaucer and others did before Dryden; and when he wrote from his heart, he was a true poet; but Dryden *had* no heart—he was like Washington Irving's cabbage, all head. He was a rhyming polemic, mighty "in the war of verse," but not a poet. Contrary to the general opinion, however, I venture to assert, that

Digitized by Google

although he was not, like Pope, a poet, he was, as a versifier, (not in correctness, but in higher essentials,) immeasurably superior to Pope; as you may convince yourselves by comparing his version of "The Knight's Tale" with Pope's of "The Wife of Bath," which, though fine, is not finest. But I like neither of these authors. If Dryden's flight is strong, he flies on wings of wire, and there is no beauty on his plumage: it is not wet with the dews of morning—no, for he does not rise "from the daisy's side." Pope, in his versification, closed his eyes against the awful fact, *that evil is a great principle of nature;* so, he made his lines faultless—*and that is a fault, which we sinners cannot forgive.*

Poets, it is said, are all *mad*, more or less; but, if so, it seems strange that the least poetical of them are the maddest of all. One would like to be mad, after the manner of Shakspeare, and, perhaps, after the manner of Pope; for how great must have been the power of the latter, if, by the mere force of style, he has compelled mankind to receive illogical conclusions as proverbial truths.

That he has done so is proved by many a notorious passage in his works, and by a couplet which, oddly enough, might be said to parody and refute itself.

Digitized by Google

Obscene discourse admits of *no* defence,
For want of decency is want of sense.

But—

If want of decency is want of sense,
Obscene discourse admits of *that* defence.

"One truth is clear," said he: "whatever is, is right." Now, it may be very *true*, that whatever is, "is right," but it is *not* clear. It is quite clear, that whatever is, "*is*"; the other assertion admits of argument.

The five remaining poets named, though they were surrounded by innumerable imitators of Pope, have not the slightest resemblance to that great writer. Blank verse, the most diffuse of our measures, comes from the pen of Young, as condensed almost as Pope's rhyme. But no two things can be more unlike each other than the epigrammatic blank verse of Young, and the epigrammatic couplets of Pope—except the *minds* of the two authors; and that of Young must have been a great mind, or how could he be, at once, abstracted and popular? God made him a poet; and in spite of his determination to be a metrical sophist, he *is* a poet—in sublimity second only to Milton.

Thomson, too, had a style, that is, a *mind*, of his own. *He* did not worship the musical snuff-

Digitized by Google

box, though it has a diamonded lid. *He* determined to be *himself;* and the determination was a patent of immortality. Thomson is the most popular of English poets,—the poet of young affections; and will ever be so, because he had a heart which could not grow old. To quote from a writer so well known, might seem a waste of time: I cannot, however, resist the temptation of reciting a few lines from his description of the storm in Winter; the grandeur of which, I believe, is unsurpassed by any descriptive poetry in the world.

Along the woods, *along* the moorish fens,
Sighs the sad genius of the coming storm.
The cormorant on high
Wheels *from* the deep, and screams along the land.
Loud shrieks the soaring heron; and with wild wing
The circling sea-fowl cleave the flaky clouds.
Then comes the Father of the Tempest forth,
Wrapt in black gloom.
At last, *the roused-up river* pours along;
From the rude mountain, and the mossy wild,
Tumbling through rocks abrupt, and sounding far,
Resistless, roaring, dreadful, *down* it comes;
While from its bottom turn'd, the passive main
Bursts into chaos.

I need not point out to you the power of the word "along," in the first line of this passage;

Digitized by Google

the sublime circumstance of the "genius of the coming storm" preceding the Almighty Father of the Tempest, in this awful manifestation of his greatness; the ideality, force, and truth of the epithet in the "roused-up river"; and the almost Miltonic imagination displayed in the description of the sea "bursting into chaos."

All the genuine English poetry written in the period which elapsed from the death of Milton to the appearance of Cowper and Burns—I mean, all the poetry worthy of the Elizabethan era of our literature, and excepting, of course, the poetry of Otway, Young, and Thomson, already alluded to—is comprised in, perhaps, fewer than one thousand lines, which are to be found in the masterpieces of Goldsmith, Gray, and Collins. Of the innumerable faultless couplets, written by the imitators of Pope in any year of the period in which these three genuine poets wrote, perhaps not fifty deserved to be called poetry. Why, then, should they have been written, if mere verse, though excellent as such, cannot live; and if the rule for writing good verse is, that with all the qualities of verse, it shall be equal as language to the best prose? The fact of their having been written, (by commonplace persons, too,) proves that there are harder tasks than the stringing of abstract terms in heroic rhyme. Any well-read

Digitized by Google

lad of good sense may, in six months, learn to write as good *epigrammatic* couplets as any in Pope. Let me not be misunderstood: I do not say that it is not difficult to write good epigrammatic couplets, but that it is still more difficult to forge penknife blades, or, perhaps, to cut sparables. I know I am heretical in this opinion; but why should we quarrel about rhymes and rhymesters? They certainly are not of the most important things in this world, whether poetry be so or not. What is verse itself, but an artifice? I write in rhyme, because my thoughts are not good enough for prose. He who writes prose must write sense; but half-thoughts may *pass* for poetry. I do not say that half-thoughts *are* poetry; for Milton's thoughts are often aggregates of thoughts; and Shakspeare's thoughts are often aggregates of thoughts and feelings—that is, they are *more* than thoughts. I will endeavour to make this plain, by repeating a couplet from Mr. Lane's poem on the statue of his dead child:

I *see* thee in thy beauty, with thy *waving* hair at rest—
And thy *busy* little fingers, folded lightly on thy breast.

In this passage, the words "*busy* little fingers," express an *aggregate* of thoughts and *feelings*; though referring directly to the lifeless statue, they bring before the mind and heart of the

Digitized by Google

reader the living child, and its brief, sad, beautiful history. The thoughts they express are *more* than thoughts.

I have said, that there is as much difference between the melody of Pope, and the organ-music of Milton, as there is between a pin and a steam-engine; and I will now say, that there is as much difference between the couplets of Pope and of Goldsmith, as between pins and primroses. There are single lines in Gray and Collins—true and simple as the truth of ideal beauty, and the seeming results of a happy instinct—which have each cost more labour, probably, than any fifty in Pope; not that fine lines are not to be found in him—for we all remember the sigh "wafted" (in a letter) "from Indus to the pole," and the death by a rose, "in aromatic pain"; but the "faultless couplets," and "divine compliments of the English Boileau," remind one of the posy of a ring, and might be slung round the neck, on a locket, whereas, such lines are the staple of his less voluminous successors. Doubtless, there is in Pope as fine composition, *of some sort*, as any in Gray; but there are passages in the latter, to which, *as poetry*, there is nothing in Pope that will bear the least comparison. I will not quote them, for they are familiar to most of you, as the faces of your mothers.

Digitized by Google

In the outset of this lecture, I stated my intention of showing, that our poets of the French school, compared with our Elizabethan poets, and those of the present day, are essentially unideal and undramatic; and this, I think, I shall do, if I show that the great head of that school here, is deficient in the two highest constituents of the highest poetry. But Young, Thomson, Goldsmith, Gray, and Collins—I must request you to observe—are not poets of the French school; they are *English* through bone and marrow.

I scarcely need tell you, that poetry may be ideal without being indistinct. Wordsworth, literal as Crabbe, is ideal as Shakspeare, who never wrote with more of imaginative truth and beauty than Wordsworth does, when he says of his homeless wanderer, that "she was known to every star and every blast that blows." And I scarcely need tell you, that poetry may be dramatic without being written in dialogue. Milton, who wrote two dramas, is utterly undramatic, but not unideal; Cowper, one of the most original of poets, is dramatic, though he never wrote a play. Milton says of the fallen angel, Moloch—"*He* trusted with th' Eternal to be deemed equal in strength, and rather than be less cared not to be at all." No language can be stronger than this; it is condensed as Byron's description of the de-

Digitized by Google

stroying wind, which is where nothing else is, "the most lone Simoom"; but it is quite undramatic. If Cowper had described Moloch, he would probably have placed him in action before us; he would have represented him stretching forth his arm in defiance towards the throne of the Most High, and impiously vociferating, "Pull him down!"

I shall be sorry to do injustice to Pope in my quotations; I confess, I am prejudiced against him, and against the school of which he is the head; but "he was a great writer of some sort," and his "Rape of the Lock" shows that he was a man of genius and a poet. As, however, he was himself of opinion that his highest excellences are to be found in his delineations of character, I shall not, I think, be unjust to him, if I quote some of the best of them.

How much easier is it to say what a man is, than to put words into his mouth which shall not only show what he is, but place him, living, before our eyes! Pope describes—Scott narrates—Cowper impersonates. Shakspeare has drawn the character of King Henry the Eighth to the life, in seven syllables. He represents that monarch as having discovered a conspiracy of Gardiner and others against Cranmer. One of the conspirators, approaching him with bow and

Digitized by Google

cringe, says, "May it please you, Sire!" "No, Sir! it does not please me," replies the hard-ruled king. Is this a *description* of bluff Henry? No; it is Henry himself. Pope seldom puts words into the mouths of his characters, which bring them, as it were, into our presence. In his character of Atossa, however, he attempts this, and with some success:—

> Who breaks with her, provokes revenge from hell,
> But he's a bolder man who dares be well.
> Superiors? death! and equals? what a curse!
> But an inferior not dependent! worse.
> Offend her, and she knows not to forgive;
> Oblige her, and she 'll hate you while you live;
> But die, and she'll adore you.—Then the bust
> And temple rise—and fall again to dust.
> Last night her lord was all that's good and great;
> A knave this morning, and his will a cheat.

His description of the profligate Duke of Buckingham, dying, impoverished and deserted, at a miserable inn, is a favourite with his admirers; and as it is, at least, an average specimen of his mastery in the portraiture of men and manners, I shall recite it. It does not, indeed, record one of those terrible catastrophes, those fated changes of fortune, which teach the proud that they are men, and which the Muse has deplored "in the devoted

Digitized by Google

races of Pelops and of Cadmus": but whether she speak of kings, or lords or beggars, it is of man that she speaks; and the deserved ruin of the "lord of useless thousands," though it possesses neither tragic nor epic dignity, is possibly more instructive, if less affecting, than the death of Hector, the foreshown doom of his august Andromache, and the fall of Priam's great city, which constitute the interest of Homer's mightiest work.

In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half hung,
The floor of plaster, and the walls of dung,
On once a flock-bed, but repaired with straw,
With tape-tied curtains, never meant to draw,
The George and Garter dangling from that bed
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
Great Villiers lies—Alas!—how changed from him,
The life of pleasure, and the soul of whim!
Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love;
Or just as gay at council, in a ring
Of mimic statesmen, and their merry king.
No wit to flatter, left of all his store!
No fool to laugh at—which he valued more.
There, victor of his health, of fortune, friends,
And fame—this lord of useless thousands ends.

Certainly this is a fine and instructive picture of dying profligacy. But it turns over for our instruction no new page in the history of the

Digitized by Google

heart. It is destitute of the ideality which exalts the delineations of Shakspeare, Burns, and others. To be convinced of this, you have only to compare it at random, with almost any page of their writings; for instance, with that passage in the world's poet, where Ophelia, driven to madness by sudden, unexpected, and, to her, inexplicable misfortunes, tries to account for them, by reasoning on the chorus of an old nursery song, which asserts, "that the owl was once a baker's daughter." Ought she to wonder that the noble mind of her princely lover has lost its balance? that the high-hearted Hamlet is false to her? that the brave Hamlet has assassinated her helpless and unoffending father? and that suspicions, incredible yet true, have fallen upon the queen, whom she had almost worshipped as a model of all excellence on this side Heaven? Ought she to wonder at these things—can anything on earth be wonderful—*if* the owl was once a baker's daughter? Her poor brain—like Othello's heart, "perplexed in the extreme,"—*believes* the strange assertion, and reasons on it as a fact. "They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord! we know what we are, but know not what we may be." These simple words lay bare the depths of the soul, and are worth any ten pages in Dryden or Pope. They remind us, *by their profundity*, of

Digitized by Google

the "sulky sullen dame," in "Tam o' Shanter." The laugh, you know, is all against the poor woman; but she is not one of those wives who quarrel with good husbands because they are not bad ones, and whom none but bad ones can cure; she has ample cause for sullenness; yet so attached is she to that strange compound of whimsicality, comicality, and animality, drawn to the very life by Robin in his glory, that she is forced to keep her wrath warm by nursing it. While she is "gathering her brows like gathering storm," we see that her heart is overflowing with tenderness towards the profligate scapegrace who sins "from November till October"—that is, all the year round—and whose whole life is one great wrong done to her; and though she afterwards tells him "weel," that "he is a blethering, blustering drunkard," she has also her miserable forebodings, "that late or soon he will be found deep drowned in Doon." These are touches of nature, such as we shall vainly seek in any writer of the French school. But as it is, perhaps, unfair to contrast Pope with Shakspeare and Burns, writers of a totally different character, I will now compare him with Cowper, a dramatist who never wrote a play, a didactic poet whose words are action.

Digitized by Google

Adieu, Vinosa cries—ere yet he sips
The purple bumper, trembling at his lips—
Adieu to all morality, if grace
Make works a *vain ingredient* in the case.
The Christian hope is—Waiter, draw the cork—
If I mistake not—Blockhead! with a fork!—
Without good works, whatever some may boast,
Mere folly and delusion.—Sir, your toast!
My firm persuasion is, at least sometimes,
That heaven will weigh man's virtues and his crimes.
I plant my foot upon this ground of trust,
And silence every fear, with, God is just.
But if perchance, on some dull drizzling day,
A thought intrude that says, or seems to say,
If *thus* th' important cause is to be tried,
Suppose the beam should dip on the wrong side;
I *soon* recover from these *needless* frights,
And, God is merciful—sets *all* to rights.
Thus, between justice, as my prime support,
And mercy, fled to as the last resort,
I glide and steal along with heaven in view,
And—Pardon me—the bottle stands with you.
I never will believe, the col'nel cries,
The sanguinary schemes that some devise.
My creed is—he is safe that does his best;
And death's a doom sufficient for the rest.

Right, says an ensign; and, for aught I see,
Your faith and mine substantially agree;
The best of every man's performance here
Is to discharge the duties of his sphere.

Digitized by Google

A soldier's best is courage in the field,
With nothing here that wants to be conceal'd:
The man who scorns to do a wrong by stealth
Must go to heaven—and I must drink his health.
Sir Smug, he cries, (for lowest at the board,
Just made fifth chaplain of his patron lord,
His shoulders witnessing by many a shrug
How much his feelings suffer'd—sate Sir Smug,)
Your office is to winnow false from true;
Come, Prophet, drink, and tell us, what think you?

Sighing and smiling as he takes his glass,
Which they that woo preferment rarely pass;
Fallible man, the church-bred youth replies,
Is still found *fallible*, however wise;
And differing judgments serve but to declare
The truth lies somewhere, if we knew but where.
Of all it ever was my lot to read,
Of critics now alive, or long since dead,
The book of all the world that pleased me most
Was—well-a-day! the *title-page* was lost!
The writer well remarks, a heart that knows
To take with gratitude what heav'n bestows,
With *prudence always ready* at our call
To guide our use of it, is all in all.
Doubtless it is.—To which, of my own store,
I superadd a few essentials more;
But these—excuse the liberty I take—
I wave just now, for conversation sake.
Spoke like an oracle, they all exclaim,
And add *Right Rev'rend* to Smug's honour'd name.

I shall not treat Pope fairly if I do not quote

Digitized by Google

from some one of the works which his heart wrote, and which are therefore masterpieces. He is worthy of your attention in more ways than one; for not only was he a poet and a philosopher, but—which is of infinitely more importance —an honest man. But when we read him, we read, I am sorry to believe, one of the most indecent looking books in the world. How are we to account for this remarkable circumstance? One might imagine a glutton becoming web-footed with eating ducks; but to suppose that Pope became indecent by keeping good company, would be to indicate that we had never kept good company ourselves. It may not be certain that clean people have the uncleanest ideas; but it is quite so that quotations cannot always be made from Pope, without offending modern delicacy. I ought to recite a portion, at least, of his "Eloisa to Abelard"; for time has passed judgment on it; great critics declare it to be unrivalled in tenderness and elegance, by any composition, original or translated, in our language; and when the impugners of Pope assert, that he never affects the heart, his admirers triumphantly appeal to that poem. Unfortunately, however, I cannot feel its pathos, and therefore cannot make it felt by you.

It is easy to declaim in rhyme—to string common-place metaphors in rhyme—to ring changes

Digitized by Google

in rhyme, on such cold abstractions as glory, honour, discord, &c.; but it is very difficult to write a letter well in rhyme. I cannot say that Pope has succeeded. Burns has, again and again; his rhymed epistles are his masterpieces, and consequently masterpieces of literature; but in his choice of rhyming from two dialects, he had a great advantage. Perhaps, the most difficult of all tasks is, to tell a tale of common life well in rhyme. The English poet who has succeeded best in bending this bow of Ulysses, is Wordsworth—next to him in merit, is Crabbe; but Pope also has succeeded, and as I am prejudiced against him, it will be only fair that I allow you to judge of his power in narrative. I will recite, then, the last courtship of the wife of five husbands, translated by Pope from the Anglicised French, or Frenchified Saxon of Chaucer. It is very instructive, and ought to teach young men not to marry those pious formalists—*alias*, punctual gadders,—who cannot be happy at home.

Now for my fifth loved lord, the *last and best*,
(Kind heav'n afford him everlasting rest!)
Full hearty was his love, and I can show
The tokens on my ribs, in black and blue.
In pure good will I took this jovial spark,
Of Oxford he, a most egregious clerk;

Digitized by Google

He boarded with a widow in the town,
A *trusty* gossip, one dame Alison;
Full well the secrets of my soul she knew,
Better than e'er our parish priest could do.
To her I told whatever *could* befall:
Had but my husband cough'd against a wall,
Or done a thing that might have cost his life,
She—and my niece—and one more worthy wife
Had known it all; what most he would conceal,
To these I made no scruple to reveal.
Oft has he blush'd from ear to ear for shame,
That e'er he told a secret to his dame.

It so befell, in holy time of Lent,
That of a day I to this gossip went,
(My husband, thank my stars, was out of town,)
From house to house we rambled up and down;
This clerk, myself, and my good neighbour Alse,
To see, be seen, to tell, and gather tales.
Visits to every church we *duly* paid,
And march'd in *every* holy masquerade;
The wasting moth ne'er spoil'd *my* best array—
The cause was this, I wore it *every day*.
'Twas when fresh May her early blossom yields,
This clerk and I were walking in the fields;
I vow'd, if e'er my husband fill'd his urn,
That he, and only he, should serve my turn.
I vow'd I scarce could sleep since first I knew him,
And durst be sworn he had *bewitched* me to him;
If e'er I slept, I dream'd of him alone,
And dreams foretell, as learned men have shown:
All this I said, but dreams, Sirs, I had none;

Digitized by Google

I follow'd but my crafty crony's lore,
Who bade me tell this lie, and twenty more.

Thus, day by day, and month by month we past;
It pleased the Lord to *take* my spouse at last.
I tore my gown, I soil'd my locks with dust,
And beat my breast, as wretched widows *must*.
Before my face my handkerchief I spread,
To hide the floods of tears I did not shed.
The good man's coffin to the church was borne;
Around, the neighbours, and my clerk, too, mourn.
But as he march'd, good gods! he show'd a pair
Of legs and feet, so clean, so strong, and fair!
Of twenty winters' age he seem'd to be;
I (to say truth) was twenty more than he:
But to my tale. A month scarce pass'd away,
With dance and song we kept the nuptial day.
All I possessed I gave to his command,
My goods and chattels, money, house, and land;
But oft repented, and repent it still;
He prov'd a rebel to my sovereign will.
Stubborn as any lioness was I;
And knew full well to raise my voice on high:
He against this right sagely would advise,
And old examples set before my eyes;
But this avail'd not; for whoe'er he be
That tells my faults, I hate him mortally.

My spouse (who was, you know, to learning bred)
A certain treatise oft at evening read,
Where divers authors (whom the devil confound
For all their lies) were in one volume bound.
It chanced my husband, on a winter's night,
Read in this book aloud, with strange delight,

Digitized by Google

How the first woman, (as the scriptures show,)
Brought her own spouse and all his race to woe.
How Samson fell; and he whom Dejanire
Wrapp'd in th' envenom'd shirt, and set on fire.
How curs'd Eryphille *her* lord betrayed,
And the dire ambush Clytemnestra laid.

Long time I heard, and swell'd, and blush'd, and frown'd,
But when no end of these vile tales I found,
Provoked to vengeance three large leaves I tore,
And with one buffet fell'd him on the floor.
With that my husband in a fury rose,
And down he settled me, with hearty blows.
I groaned—and lay extended on my side;
"Oh, thou hast slain me for my wealth," I cried,
"Yet I forgive thee—take my last embrace"—
He wept, kind soul! and stoop'd to kiss my face,
I took him such a box as turn'd him blue,
Then sigh'd, and cried, "Adieu, my dear, adieu!"

But after many a hearty struggle past,
I condescended to be pleased at last.
Soon as he said, "My *mistress* and my wife,
Do what you please, the term of all your life,"
I took to heart the *merits* of the cause,
And stood content to rule by wholesome laws.
As for the volume that reviled the dames,
'Twas torn to fragments, and condemned to flames.

Now, heav'n, on all my husbands gone, bestow
Pleasure above for tortures felt below;
That rest they wish'd for, *grant* them in the grave;
And bless the souls my conduct helped to save!

Digitized by Google

The patience with which you have heard long extracts from the sofa-and-lap-dog poet, indicates that he is a greater poet than the envy, malice, and all uncharitableness of the rhymester of the rabble can afford to allow; but before I shall have inflicted upon you a dozen more lectures on those men who, in our days, write, or have written, that something, or that nothing, which is called poetry, you will feel with me, that our country need not blush for her younger children —the poets of regeneration in poetry, and of improvement in the *mind* and condition of universal man.

It is remarkable, that of the countless imitators of the author of the "Essay on Man"—though their verses, as mere verses, were I doubt not, as good as his own—not *one* has escaped oblivion. This, I say, is remarkable, but it is not at all surprising; for plagiarists resemble those men who obtain celebrity by getting their coffins made before they die. Imitation itself might be figured by the horse of the poet Ariosto—(mark the fact! the poet had a horse!) "My horse," said he, "has all the good qualities which a man could wish for in a horse; but he has one fault—he is dead." When Locke said of Pope's imitators, "that their poetry was ingenious nonsense," he could not be quite right; it was "ingenious non-

Digitized by Google

sense," barring the ingenuity. Dismal to the last, in the day of those mimics, was the cold dead sea of poetic parrotry—colder and more dismal even than prose declamation. But the French revolution was approaching. The mighty breath and voice of Tendency startled, at length, the barren deep—upheaved the stagnant mass of rhymed perfectibility, and foamed the waves with living fire. There were *men* asleep on the dreary shore, and to them that voice said, "Arise, and walk!" They arose, and stood—amid the ruins of the temple of formalities; from the portals of which the baboons of worshipped idleness and mischief had for ages blasphemed their feeders, and out of the fragments of which they are in vain reconstructing pagods of abomination. The fall of that temple proved its worthlessness; so men began thenceforth, each in his own way, to build for themselves. Of two of these *men*, Cowper and Burns, I have to speak in my next lecture. Either they lived and wrote in vain, or they were, like John in the wilderness, heralds of redemption, pioneers of the singers of glad tidings in prose and verse, who shall proclaim, "That from the *thronged* table, and out of the battle for *bread*, shall yet come happiness for the many, and plenty for all!" They, it is true, who preach that charity begins at home, and ought to end

Digitized by Google

there, are justly apprehensive that the diffusion of knowledge would not increase the prosperity of pickpockets; but then, even they have no more desire to be eaten raw and alive, "than any unregenerate heathen like you or me." I have heard, or read, or written, "that population is destined to become another Alaric;"—yes, for he was not a destroyer, but an Ameliorator. An era of competitive coöperation in good is, I trust, approaching—when "*toil without hope*" will no longer oppress the soul, like the solitude of a place where the works of men are, and men are not. Are *we* men? What see we around us, but the triumphs of skill and labour rewarding barbarism? What is the world in which we *now* live, but a place where the works of men are, and men, as they ought to be, are not? The cunning fox is here, the beauteous and venomous serpent, the terrible human savage, haunting the ruins of the soul, and nicknamed esquire, or lord, or merchant,—but where is the likeness of God? "Cain! Cain! where is thy brother?" We inhabit a den of degraded and degrading victims and victimizers, the ancestors of the latter of whom monopolized knowledge, and (as it would seem) made it a curse, that their descendants might monopolize ignorance. But the new name of Knowledge will be Legion! this *our* poets,

Digitized by Google

from Cowper and Burns, to Byron and Nicoll—and the subjects which our times have *dictated* to them—prophesy and prove. The ignorant cannot long misgovern the enlightened. They may pull down on their heads the Corinthian capital of the solitary column; but they can neither rebuild nor sustain the mouldering edifices of despotism. Nor could they, if it would console them, (and perhaps it would,) destroy the *community* with themselves. "The Palmyra of their Misrule" may be a warning, but it cannot be "a Tadmor in the *desert*." The poets of our times, then, have indeed a prospect of glorious usefulness before them, whether they write in prose or verse. Oh, that I might live to be the author of some great prose epic, which, though unimmortal itself, might survive long enough to be in its consequences a river of fertility, influencing beneficially unborn generations of men! Who would not be one of the Legion of Immortals, though frail as the flower of the field, yet eternal in their usefulness? Shakspeare or Milton of this year or the next! what, though it may be true that universal reputations are no longer possible? and what, though it may be true that the soldiers of the Legion of Good Works will be so numerous as to tread down each other? Their consequences cannot be trodden down. Your writings may perish with,

Digitized by Google

or before you, but not their results, if indeed ye are Shakspeares or Miltons. Forget not that the instrument of your usefulness is all but indestructible. Why do tyrants wage covert war on language? Because it is a barrier on which *cannon balls* can make no impression. The Russian autocrat, it has been said, is trying to extinguish the *language* of Poland! From her exiles—homeless children of a murdered country—he would take even the remembrance of the voice of their mother! We pray not, that her curse, mingled forever in his cup of blood and fire, may be to him the worm that never dies: No! but we tell him that the affections cannot die, and that if truth is eternal, thought is so. Even if he could succeed in destroying the Polish language and Poland itself, and the writings of her poets and sages—still, some patriot spirit, winged from this planet, would transmit to the angels the beautiful thought of Poland's Copernicus, that the sun is the centre of our system. I can imagine Raphael, after the extinction of suns and systems, redrawing the Cartoons, in the presence of Paul of Tarsus. If the language of Scott and Bacon should be heard no more on earth, Pollok might transcribe for Milton "The Cottar's Saturday Night" of Burns, and Hemans recite to Sappho "The Daisy" of Montgomery. If the country itself of Wallace

Digitized by Google

and Shakspeare should perish, Bentham might record in a better world the sublime conception of the mechanic, James Watt, that the food of millions could be furnished by the vapour of a tea-kettle, and the human race lifted ultimately out of ignorance and want by a lever of steam!

Digitized by Google

A LECTURE ON COWPER AND BURNS, THE TWO EARLIEST GREAT POETS OF THE MODERN SCHOOL.

WRITTEN FOR THE SHEFFIELD MECHANICS' INSTITUTION,

BY EBENEZER ELLIOTT.

YOUNG MEN!—Is it truly said that the age we live in is very unpoetical? I think not. Never was the best poetry better appreciated in this country than at present; for even in the Elizabethan period of our literature, the best poetry was not always best appreciated. Perhaps there is more poetry in the "Bride of Lammermoor," or in the mere conception of the character of the Master of Ravenswood, than in all the poets of the fifty years that immediately preceded the Modern school of poetry. Cowper and Burns were the earliest great poets of that school; and of them I proceed to speak.

Cowper, you are aware, was highly educated; and Burns was better educated than nineteen-twentieths of Englishmen are. But Burns was self-taught, we are told. So was Cowper. So is

Digitized by Google

every man of genius. It is in being self-taught, that men of genius differ from other men; or how happened Cowper, in his writings, to oppose totally the approved standards of his day? Perhaps the productions of that power which is called genius, are not results of qualities inherent in their authors, but of fortunate circumstances, or even of disadvantages conquered: for instance, a man may conquer the disadvantages of a good education, as Milton did; or convert a bad one into the best, as Shakspeare did. I know a man who has obtained some literary notoriety in consequence of having a defective memory, which retains nothing but leading facts and principles. Now, Burns, when quite a youth, living on six pounds twelve shillings a year, had the honour, it is said, to establish one of the earliest subscription libraries in Scotland—a glory worth living for. The funds of the subscribers would not allow them to buy many books, but the books they did buy were good ones. Burns, then, could not become an indiscriminate reader, or he might possibly have formed his taste on worse models than the "Letters of Junius." Six pounds twelve shillings a year is a small sum for a hungry youth to live upon; but if Burns had not known what poverty is, would he have written his "Cottar's Saturday Night"? And if he had not

Digitized by Google

had the misfortune to be a gauger—too well acquainted with alehouse doings—could he have written his "Tam O' Shanter?" It is more than probable, then, that he owed much of his literary success to misfortunes — vanquished, and converted into their opposites. It is certain that Cowper did: he derived strength from his weakness: he had to fight battles with his miserable constitution, and he gained glorious victories over it. His works are those victories. How good, then, is God, even in what he denies! and how thankless are they who do not use what he gives! The dullest mechanic, by merely reading what is excellent in our language—the masterpieces alone—might, in a few months, become allied to the highest minds, a co-partner in excellence; and, if thought is eternal, a shareholder with immortality. Think of this, Young Men! for you cannot win the race of knowledge (which is virtue) by lagging behind the age in which you live; and if you cannot answer Time—the great questioner here—how will you answer God, when he asks you, not if you won the race, but why you stood still?

It is not easy to conceive any two men more unlike each other, than Cowper and Burns were; and yet, in their genius, there is much similarity. Burns, perhaps, was twice as much a man as

Digitized by Google

Cowper, and the tenth part of the tithe as much a poet as Shakspeare or Scott: he was a giant, nevertheless. *His* Muse was manliness: he was honest and fearless. The Muse of Cowper was conscience: *he* was honest but not fearless: he trembled, and a shadow overthrew him—but it was a shadow darker than the shadow of death. He would have been a far greater poet than he was, if disease had not made him a coward. Not that he was insincere: oh no! and yet he dared not whisper to his poor heart that God is merciful. Nor was his despair unpoetical; but the hope of Burns is more poetical than Cowper's despair; and Burns had this further advantage, that he neither despaired of man as he is, nor of his ultimate destiny. How much more respectable human nature appears in our eyes after reading Burns, than after reading Byron!

The language of Burns is frequently as condensed as that of Pope. Some of his lines contain as many thoughts as words. I will quote one of these: "his locked, letter'd, braw brass collar:" here are six thoughts in six words. Never, perhaps, was there a more pregnant style. And he is the most unsophisticated of poets. He is earnest as Milton, earnest as Cromwell, earnest as the Pilgrim Fathers, who, seeking the free worship of God on the shores of America, planted

Digitized by Google

the world's political redemption in a wilderness of wants. His readers never mistrust him. It is not the poetry that we like, but the man. He has stamped his honest, fearless, individuality upon his writings: they are all marked "Robert Burns."

If you doubt the similarity of the minds of these two men, compare any one of the rhymed epistles of Burns, with the rhymed epistle of Cowper to Joseph Hill:—

"An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,
Broad cloth without, and a warm heart within."

Burns, however, had a great advantage over Cowper, in his option of rhyming either in English, or in his sweet native Doric. Burns knew this well. No man ever understood better his powers, or his position. I, therefore, venture to predict, that the rhymed epistles of Burns will never be excelled; nay, so unsurpassable is their excellence, that (if genius supposes judgment) few men of genius would attempt to imitate them. He was warned, indeed, that his truthfulness (his vulgarity it was called) would be fatal to the longevity of his writings. Wordsworth has had similar warnings; but if *he* fail to become permanently popular, he will not fail because his sub-

Digitized by Google

jects are mean, but because what is called his simplicity, is that worst of all affectations, the affectation of unaffectedness.

It would be preposterous to class such writers as Cowper, our best ethic poet, and Burns, our best sentimental poet, with such writers (there are none such) as Shakspeare and Scott; but it cannot be denied that they are, though not greatest, great. Cowper, in fourteen of the noblest lines ever written, enumerates some of the qualities which, in his opinion, are requisite to constitute the character of a great poet:—

"Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought:
Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought;
Fancy, which from the bow that spans the sky
Brings colours dipp'd in heaven, that never die;
A soul exalted above earth; a mind
Skill'd in the characters that form mankind;
And as the sun, in rising beauty dress'd,
Looks to the westward from the dappled east,
And marks, (whatever clouds may interpose,)
Ere yet his race begins, its glorious close;
An eye like his, to catch the distant goal,
Or, ere the wheels of verse begin to roll,
Like his, to shed illuminating rays
On every scene and subject it surveys."

Both these poets combined, do not possess all the requistes to form a Shakspeare or a Scott;

Digitized by Google

and it is remarkable, that Cowper, in his enumeration, leaves unmentioned the quality in which himself and Burns were most deficient. Montgomery, rich in heavenly thoughts, "and that sweet peace which goodness bosoms ever"—Montgomery, who has been called our second Cowper, and our miniature Milton, unlike them both, abounds in tenderness; but if I have been able to find only one deeply pathetic passage in the writings of Cowper, you will perhaps say the fault is mine. The lines I allude to, are called "The Castaway:" they are a narrative of the death of a sailor who was washed from the wreck of Admiral Anson's ship; and they conclude with this dismal stanza:—

> No voice divine the storm allay'd,
> No light propitious shone,
> When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
> *We* perished, *each* alone;
> But I beneath a rougher sea,
> And whelm'd in *deeper* gulphs than he.

Few as are the pathetic passages in the works of Burns, they are sufficiently numerous to show, that "the weeping blood of woman's heart" was not unknown to him: how *could* it be unknown to one of the warmest hearts that ever beat? Perhaps he was too manly to weep often; but, if

Digitized by Google

so, his tears are not the less affecting on that account. Is it possible for words to exceed in pathos the apostrophe of the captive Queen of Scots to her absent son?

> God shield thee frae thy mother's foes,
> Or turn their hearts to thee!
> But if thou meet thy mother's *friend*,
> Remember *him* for me!

How plain, how true are these words! Burns was too honest to sacrifice sense to sound: in some of his tenderest verses, he can scarcely be said to rhyme at all. I will try, by a very short extract from one of the finest of his poems, to illustrate the single-heartedness of his character.

> Oh, pale, pale, now those rosy lips
> *I oft has kiss'd* sae fondly!
> And closed for aye the sparkling glance
> That dwelt on *me* sae kindly!
> And mouldering now in silent dust
> The heart that lo'ed *me* dearly!
> But still, within my bosom's core,
> Shall live my Highland Mary!

Here is *no* sophistication. The pale lips were the lips that he had *kissed;* the closed eyes were the eyes that had looked on *him* with fondness; the mouldering heart was the heart that *loved*

Digitized by Google

him. He was not afraid to be told that his love was selfish; it was enough for him that it was the love that God made.

With similar honesty, and with true piety, he calls the mouse "his fellow-mortal;" for, says Coleridge,

> He prayeth best, who *loveth* best
> All things, both great and small,
> For the dear God who loveth *us*,
> He made, and loveth all.

Burns having been called the Camoens of Scotland, I will recite a sonnet of the Portuguese bard, on the death of his mistress:—

That gentle, bounteous hand; that heart sincere;
Those locks of light, that shamed the beams of day;
Those charming eyes, within whose starry sphere
Love, turned from Heaven, charmed all my cares away;
Are changed, for ever changed, and turned to clay.
Death! thou hast torn, in one unpitying hour,
The plant to which, ere scarce it bore a flower,
The mellower fruitage of its prime was given;
Love saw the deed, and as he lingered near,
Sigh'd o'er the ruin, and return'd to Heav'n.

The author, in every fibre of his frame, felt this to be true poetry; yet it wants the heartiness, the downright sincerity of our northern

Digitized by Google

Camoens. The literature of the last sixty years can boast, at least, two truth tellers,—Rousseau and Burns; but Rousseau told the truth of himself as a duty, Burns unconsciously, as a flower unfolds its petals,—and the latter revelation is likeliest to be the true one.

There are thoughts which, generally, it would be in the highest degree improper to divulge to others, but which we whisper to our hearts in spite of ourselves. They are often read in us by others, when we would not utter them for worlds. *They are poetry in the highest*, revelations of the past of thought, *warnings*,—sent of God, lest they become the past of action also; and if, after having become the past of action, they should happen to be revealed by accident, or by the agonies of a guilty conscience, they are then terribly sublime. Whoever thou art, Poet of the Future!—if such a being is now addressed by me,—listen, with trembling, to the first warnings of guilty thought; but if thou shouldst be so unhappy as to seek an excuse for evil thoughts in the evil deeds of Burns, ask thyself—before thou believe all the evil that has been imputed to him—whether he might not possibly have been justified in saying to himself, what few can say with truth, *that he was better than his reputation?* for, in speaking to his own heart, he has laid it, with

Digitized by Google

unexampled manliness, *naked* before thine. Was he not, then, a man and a brother? Compare his revealed secrets with that frightful revelation of Cardinal Beaufort in Shakspeare—that terrible poetry of *silence*—when "he died, and made no sign."

If Cowper had written songs, such was the honesty of his nature, that he would probably have equalled Burns, great as are the disadvantages under which our language would have laid him. For Burns was not the prototype of the truthfulness of Scottish song; the ancient minstrels of Scotland did not forget to avail themselves of the marvellous facilities which the dialect of their country affords to the poet; but Burns has excelled their best productions. See his "Anna," that sweetest of lyrics; or see his "Banks and Braes o' Bonny Doon," the hacknied thought expressed in which is, in other writers, a mere conceit; but in Burns, a sentiment, solemn, mournful, almost sublime. At Doncaster, when I was lecturing there, I met with one of those intimations of a better world, which give us, in this, a presage of Heaven,—a lady, beautiful, good, and all accomplished, who asked me if I could sing? I answered, "that I was passionately fond of music, but that my wife had been more than thirty years vainly trying to teach me the Hundredth psalm tune,"—there being a note

Digitized by Google

toward the close of the third line which I cannot learn. She then said, that justice, she thought, could not be done to Burns, as a lyric poet, if his songs were divorced from their appropriate tunes. I thought differently; but mentally resolved that I would sing, and also recite, as I have now done, one of his best songs; for I knew that my bad singing would, at least, seem to help my theory, —that good singing is to good recitation what a silver chain is to the lark's wing, or a parrot learning language to the flower whose silence singeth.

Cowper does not, like Burns, write the history of the poor in every page of his works, but his heart was with them; witness his description of the street-imprisoned mechanic, and his miserable attempt at a garden, "A sprig of mint, set in a spoutless teapot." They were both patriots, both honest men; but the expression of their sentiments was remarkably modified by their physical condition. Burns speaks with the animal courage of health,—Cowper, with the faltering of incipient disease, or the energy of fever. "Is there," says Burns,—

> Is there for honest poverty,
> *That hangs his head, and a' that,*—
> The coward loon! we pass *him* by;
> And dare be poor for a' that.

Digitized by Google

"He," says Cowper, "who finds one drop of heaven's sweet mercy in his cup, can dig, beg, rot, and perish, well content so he may wrap himself in honest rags at his last gasp; but could not, for a world, fish up his dirty and dependent bread from pools and ditches of the commonwealth, sordid and sickening at his own success."

If Cowper had been blessed with the physical strength of Burns, he might have been,—but I don't say he would have been,—at once, one of the greatest of poets and ablest of active men. As it is, I am unable to name a poet whose writings, page for page, can boast an equal amount of original thought and sterling common sense.

In nothing did Cowper and Burns resemble each other more than in their power of comic delineation: had they written for the stage, we should have had three Sheridans—alike, yet how different!

Here is one of Cowper's pictures, finished with minute touches of the pencil:—

Yon ancient prude, whose withered features show
She might be young some forty years ago,
Her elbows pinioned close upon her hips,
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
Her eye-brows arched, her eyes both gone astray
To watch yon amorous couple in their play,

Digitized by Google

With bony and unkerchief'd neck, defies
The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
And sails, with lappet head and mincing airs,
Duly, at clink of bell, to morning prayers.
To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
She yet allows herself that boy behind.
The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
With slip-shod heels, and dewdrop at his nose;
His predecessor's coat advanced to wear,
Which future pages yet are doomed to share;
Carries her Bible, tucked beneath his arm,
And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.
She, half an angel in her own account,
Doubts not hereafter with the saints to mount,
Though not a grace appears, on strictest search,
But that she fasts, and, *item*, goes to church.

But Burns could dash off a character with a stroke of his pen. Premising that my ignorance of the Scottish dialect will prevent me from doing him anything like justice, I will prove both these assertions by reading a few lines from a poem, which he alone of all mankind could have written. Study it, young men, if you would know what a power language is :—

TAM O' SHANTER.

When chapman billies leave the street,
And drouthy neebors neebors meet,
As market-days are wearing late,
And folk begin to tak' the gate;

Digitized by Google

While we sit bousing at the nappy,
And getting fou and unco' happy,
We think na' on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps, an' stiles,
That lie between us and our hame,
Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
Gathering her brows, like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,

Oh, Tam, hadst thou but been sae wise
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou wast a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae *November* till *October*,
Ae market-day thou wasna sober;
That *ilka* melder wi' the miller
Thou sate as lang as thou had siller;
That *every* naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the Lord's house ev'n on Sunday
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied, that late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels-sweet—
How mony prudent sage advices
The husband frae the wife despises!

Digitized by Google

But to our tale. Ae market-night
Tam had got planted unco right,
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, *drouthy* crony:
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither,
They had been fou for *weeks* thegither.
The night *drave* on wi' sangs an' clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better;
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus;
The storm without might rain and rustle,
Tam didna mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd *himsel'* amang the nappy;
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes *wing'd* their way wi' pleasure;
Kings may be *bless'd*, but Tam was *glorious*,
O'er a' the cares o' life victorious.

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
We seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow-falls in the river,
A moment white—then gone for ever.

I hold in my hand some verses which have not appeared in any collection of the works of Burns. They want his terseness and condensation; but may be his notwithstanding;—if they are—and I do not know who else could have written them,—they show that he, too, could, when he chose, finish a portrait with minute touches of the comic pencil.

Digitized by Google

THE MINISTER.

Our gudewife she keeps beef and ale,
And tea, to treat the Minister,
While I, if hungry, sup the kale;
The beef is for the Minister:
Besides, a bottle she keeps by,
To warm his heart when he's no dry,
While I the water-pail maun try;
May the deil burst the Minister!

Our Minister he has nae pride,
Not a bit the Minister;
He just sits down by our fireside
As he were no' our Minister;
He taks our gudewife by the hand,
Says, John, man, sit, what maks ye stand?
He has the bairns a' at command:
They a' ken the Minister.

But still he's useful in his place,
He's a braw man the Minister;
At ilka feast he says the grace,
Nane fitter than the Minister;
And when the glasses come in view,
He says, We'll drink, but na' get fou
Sic things the Lord doth not allow:
Yet fou gets the Minister.

Our Minister he's now fall'n sick,
Waes me, the Minister;
Wha' now shall keep us frae auld Nick,
If the Lord tak our Minister?

Digitized by Google

Left to oursels, he kens fu' weel,
The brent up stairs we canna spiel.
We maun ev'n turn back and face the deil,
If the Lord tak our Minister.

He preaches loud, does saftly pray—
Thus says our Minister,
"Ye will be sure to find the way,
If ye are like your Minister;
Ye'll get a place, ye needna fear;
Be sure that after him ye spier."
But faith, I doubt, when we get there,
We'll no see the Minister.

I must now conclude, with a few observations on the lives and characters of the two great founders of the Modern School of Poetry. Perhaps no falsehood has been more frequently repeated, than that men of genius are less fortunate and less virtuous than other men; but the obvious truth, that they who attempt little are less liable to failure than they who attempt much, will account for the proverbial good luck of fools. In our estimate of the sorrows and failings of literary men, we forget that sorrow is the common lot; we forget, too, that the misfortunes and the errors of men of genius are recorded; and that, although their virtues may be utterly forgotten, their minutest faults will be sure to find zealous historians. And this is as it should be. Let the dead instruct us. But slanderers blame,

Digitized by Google

in individuals, what belongs to the species. "We women," says Clytemnestra in Eschylus, when meditating the murder of her husband, and in reply to an attendant who was praising the gentleness of the sex, "We women are—what we are." So is it with us all. Then, let every fault of men of genius be known; but let not hypocrisy come with a sponge, and wipe away their virtues.

Of the misfortunes of Cowper, we have all heard, and certainly he was unfortunate, for he was liable to fits of insanity. But it might be said of him, that he was tended through life by weeping angels. Warm-hearted friends watched and guarded him with intense and unwearied solicitude; the kindest hearted of the softer sex, the best of the best, seem to have been born only to anticipate his wants. A glance at the world, will show us that his fate, though sad, was not saddest: for how many madmen are there, and how many men still more unfortunate than madmen, who have no living creature to aid, or soothe, or pity them! Think of Milton—"blind among enemies!"

But the saddest incident in the life of Cowper remains to be told. In his latter days, he was pensioned by the crown—a misfortune which I can forgive to him, but not to destiny. It is consoling to think, that he was not long con-

Digitized by Google

scious of his degradation after the cruel kindness was inflicted on him. But why did not his friends—if weary of sustaining their kinsman stricken by the arrows of the Almighty, suffer him to perish in a *beggars'* madhouse? Would he had died in a ditch, rather than this shadow had darkened over his grave! Burns was more fortunate in his death than Cowper: he lived self-supported to the end. Glorious hearted Burns! Noble, but unfortunate Cowper!

Burns was one of the few poets fit to be seen. It has been asserted that genius is a disease,—the malady of physical inferiority. It is certain, that we have heard of Pope, the hunchback: of Scott and Byron, the cripples: of the epileptic Julius Cæsar, who, it is said, never planned a great battle without going into fits; and of Napoleon, whom a few years of trouble killed: where Cobbett (a man of talent, not of genius) would have melted St. Helena, rather than have given up the ghost with a full belly. If Pope could have leaped over five-barred gates, he probably would not have written his inimitable sofa-and-lap-dog poetry; but it does not follow, that he would not have written the "Essay on Man;" and they who assert that genius is a physical disease, should remember that, as true critics are more rare than true poets, we having only one in our language,

Digitized by Google

William Hazlitt—so, very tall and complete men are as rare as genius itself, a fact well known to persons who have the appointment of constables. And if it is undeniable that God wastes nothing, and that we, therefore, perhaps seldom find a gigantic body combined with a soul of Æolian tones; it is equally undeniable, that Burns was an exception to the rule—a man of genius, tall, strong, and handsome, as any man that could be picked out of a thousand at a country fair.

But he was unfortunate, we are told. Unfortunate! He was a tow-heckler who cleared six hundred pounds by the sale of his poems: of which sum he left two hundred pounds behind him, in the hands of his brother Gilbert: two facts which prove that he could neither be so unfortunate, nor so imprudent, as we are told he was. If he had been a mere tow-heckler, I suspect he would never have possessed six hundred shillings.

But he *was* imprudent, it is said. Now, he is a wise man who has done one act that influences beneficially his whole life. Burns did three such acts—he wrote poetry—he published it; and, despairing of his farm, he became an exciseman. It is true he did one imprudent act; and, I hope, the young persons around me will be warned by it: he took a farm, without thoroughly under-

Digitized by Google

standing the business of farming. It does not appear that he wasted or lost any capital, except what he threw away in his farm. He was unlucky, but not imprudent in giving it up when he did. Had he held it a little longer, the Bank Restriction Act would have enriched him at the expense of his landlord; but Burns was an honest man, and, therefore, alike incapable of desiring and foreseeing that enormous villany.

But he was neglected, we are told. Neglected! No strong man, in good health, *can* be neglected, if he is true to himself. For the benefit of the young, I wish we had a correct account of the number of persons who fail of uccess, in a thousand that resolutely strive to do well. I do not think it exceeds one per cent. By whom was Burns neglected? Certainly not by the people of Scotland: for they paid him the highest compliment that can be paid to an author: they bought his book! Oh, but he ought to have been pensioned. Pensioned! Cannot we think of poets without thinking of pensions? *Are* they such poor creatures, that they cannot earn an honest living? Let us hear no more of such degrading and insolent nonsense.

But he was a drunkard, it is said. I do not mean to exculpate him, when I say, that he was, probably, no worse in that respect than his neigh-

Digitized by Google

bours; for he *was* worse if he was not better than they, the balance being against him; and his Almighty Father would not fail to say to him, "What didst thou with the lent talent?" But drunkenness, in his time, was the vice of his country—it is so still; and if the traditions of Dumfries are to be depended on, there are allurements which Burns was much less able to resist than those of the bottle; and the supposition of his frequent indulgence in the crimes to which those allurements lead, is incompatible with that of his habitual drunkenness.

When I was a lad, one of my father's workmen sometimes sent me early in the morning with a quart pot to a neighbouring alehouse, for a jack of what he called "purl;" and later in the afternoon, for a pint of ale. Finding, by dipping my finger into it, that the "purl" had a bitter taste, and nasty yellow shake-up, I never tolled it; and I observed that my employer drank it without raising his eyes; but always, before he drank his ale, *he looked at me.* The Cornlaw Rhymer, then, was a rogue from the beginning? Yes. But the Cornlaw Rhymer is not a poet; and if the slanderers of genius would consider, that, although they can place no Hamlets or Tam o' Shanters to the credit of their account, they cer-

Digitized by Google

tainly share with Shakspeare and Burns their full proportion of the faults and failings of our common humanity, we should hear less about the Dumfries Exciseman's drunkenness, and the wrongs of the dowered Ann Hathaway.

But Burns, it is said, was ungrateful to his patrons. Who were they? The Tories of his time, the fathers of men who must be clever, for, in our days, they have invented a new name for rascality, calling themselves Conservatives. But what did those lords and squires for him? They gave him a job, a nasty one; he did the work, and got the wages—with an early grave in at the bargain. No, no! He and they understood each other right well. *He* knew, and *they* knew, that men like them are as fond of men like him, as robbers are of the hangman.

But he was *politically* imprudent, we are told. Now, I do not think that any man ought to become a martyr, unless he likes martyrdom for its own sake; but they who accuse Burns of political imprudence, take a bat's view of his case —*he* took an eagle's. What should we now care for Burns, the honest, fearless exciseman, had he been a rhyming sycophant? His family, I suspect, are at this moment more prosperous, in the worldly sense of the term, than if he had died a

Digitized by Google

collector; and it is plain he could not have become one, without forfeiting that independence which binds our hearts to him.

But I shall not do justice to him, if I do not give you his picture of himself, from his letter to J. F. Erskine, Esq., written 13th April, 1793, just after he had narrowly escaped being ruined, by the arbitrary wantonness of power; especially as it has been blamed as mere bravado on the part of Burns, by a patrician critic, who, having found himself mistaken and ridiculous in his infallible decisions on modern poetry, determined to try his hand on a poet's prose. "Burns," says the bard of himself, "was a poor man from birth, and an exciseman from necessity; but the sterling ore of his worth no poverty could debase; and his independent mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Have not I, in my children, a more precious stake in my country's welfare, than the richest dukedom in it? Can I look tamely on, and see any machination wrest from my boys their birthright? Does any man tell me, that my efforts can be of no service? I tell him, that it is on men like me that a nation has to rest—men who are elevated enough to reason and reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of venal contagion. I have now drawn Burns as he is; but should any of the persons in whose hands is

Digitized by Google

the bread he eats get the least knowledge of the picture, it would ruin the poor bard for ever."

Let us now compare Burns and his prose, with Dante's prose, and the writer of it. Dante—some of you know—a senator of Florence, corruptly driven from his country, and robbed of his ample possessions, lived long in banishment, and died an exile. About the year 1316, his friends obtained his restoration to his country and his possessions, on condition that he should pay a sum of money, avow himself guilty, and ask pardon of his oppressors. This is his answer on the occasion, to an aged kinsman whom he calls "Father." "From your letter I observe how much you have at heart my welfare, and I am bound to you the more, because an exile rarely finds a friend. But I must, by my answer, disappoint some little minds. Your nephew has written to me, that I am allowed to return to Florence on certain conditions; wherein, my Father, I see two conditions that are ridiculous and impertinent. I speak of the impertinence of those who mention such conditions to me; for in *your* letter there is no such thing. Is such an invitation glorious for Dante, after suffering in exile almost fifteen years? Is it thus, then, they would recompense innocence, labour, and unremitting study? Far from me be the senseless baseness of a heart of earth, that could offer himself up, as it

Digitized by Google

were, in chains. Far from the man who cries aloud for justice, this compromise with his persecutors. No, my Father, this is not the way that shall lead me back to my country, But I shall return with hasty steps, if you can open to me a way that shall not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante; but if by no such way Florence can be entered, then shall I never enter Florence. What! can I not everywhere enjoy the sight of the sun and stars? Can I not contemplate, in any corner of the earth under the canopy of heaven, consoling and delightful truths, without rendering myself infamous? Bread, I hope, will not fail me." But bread *did* fail him. Every reader of his works must know, by heart, the prediction addressed to him by the shade of his ancestors:— "Thou shalt prove how bitter is the taste of the bread of others, how hard the road up and down strangers' stairs." But there is another passage in which he makes his readers shudder, discovering an exact portrait of himself in a man, "who, stripping himself of all shame, and trembling in his very vitals, places himself in the public way, and stretches out his hand for charity." "By such sacrifices," says the reviewer, "he preserved his principles, and sustained the magnanimity of his character;" and such are the rewards which, in all ages, have been paid to them "who are not of the wretches who may be said never to have

Digitized by Google

lived, whom God's justice disdains to punish, and and his mercy to pardon." Such, perhaps, will *ever* be the reward of the prophetic honesty of genius. *Why* were Dante and Burns persecuted? Because they saw farther than others; and what avails it to them, if the sons of their persecutors are instructed by their graves?

It is melancholy to reflect, that Burns died *just in time* to prevent the blackness of darkness from receiving its foulest blot—he did not live to be fed on alms, or stamped into a dungeon for the crime of honesty. But the rules of this Institution prevent me from saying more, than that he was one of the first victims of the English reign of terror. *Merciful death* would not allow the merciless to persecute him actually into the workhouse; but they applied to him an epithet *fatal* in those days, and not safe in these—they proclaimed him an honest man! They forbade him to *hope*. They appointed despair and wounded pride his Ganymede and Hebe; and when a man has *such* cup-bearers, we need not ask if the liquor they fill is poison.

But was there no meanness in the pride of Burns? "Give me wit," said he, "and I am contented." The boon was his in superabundance, and he was *not* contented. "Had I but hearkened to good advice," said he, "I might by this time have led a market." I doubt whether

Digitized by Google

the advice was good, but if it was, why *did* he not lead a market? They who lead markets, take the means. Instead, then, of striking dewdrops from the daisies, he should have covered himself with rust and dust, as they do. But why could he not be satisfied with the Muse, and poverty, her dower? True, he did not turn his back on the angel of his life; but he repined because she had not brought with her from heaven—a clod of clay. Out of more than two hundred thousand millions of human beings, he was an individual of the few hundreds who have won for themselves an earthly immortality—and he was dissatisfied! Surely, then, his light was not *all* "light from heaven." I can imagine the Father of Mercies looking down on him in stern pity.

Whatever his faults might be, *he* paid the penalty of them, and left the benefit to us. The most valuable bequest which a man of genius can leave to posterity, is the legacy of his faults. God, I have said, wastes nothing—no, not even the evil that men do. His eternal finger writes their lives in their deeds, that we may emulate the good, and be instructed by the evil. Burns was a poet, and a man. "The poet"—if I may use the words of Madame de Staël, the greatest *man* that ever wore petticoats—"the poet lives in his works;" but where, in this world, is the *man*

Digitized by Google

to be found, if not in our affectionate remembrance, or in our just and benevolent appreciation? Is he not defenceless? Hath he not said to us, "Forget me not?" If the life of the slandered, like Religion itself, is a poem which prosers have covered with blots—let us not forget that the blots are no part of the poem. Whoever thou art, then, that in thy *purity* judgest thy brother, reflect that all other virtues in thee are worthless, if thou hast not charity. Burns lies before thee—helpless and *self-condemned*. With the manliness which was the corner-stone of his character, he wrote a true inscription for his own grave:—

> The poor inhabitant below,
> Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
> And keenly felt the friendly glow,
> And softer flame;
> But thoughtless folly laid him low,
> And *stained* his name.

If, then, his failings are recorded for eternity, while those of other men are written in water—if to err is human—if the angels fell—"speak of him as he was, set down nought in malice;" "and let him who is without sin among you, cast the first stone" at the grave of ROBERT BURNS.

Palmer and Clayton, Printers, Crane-court, Fleet-street.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google